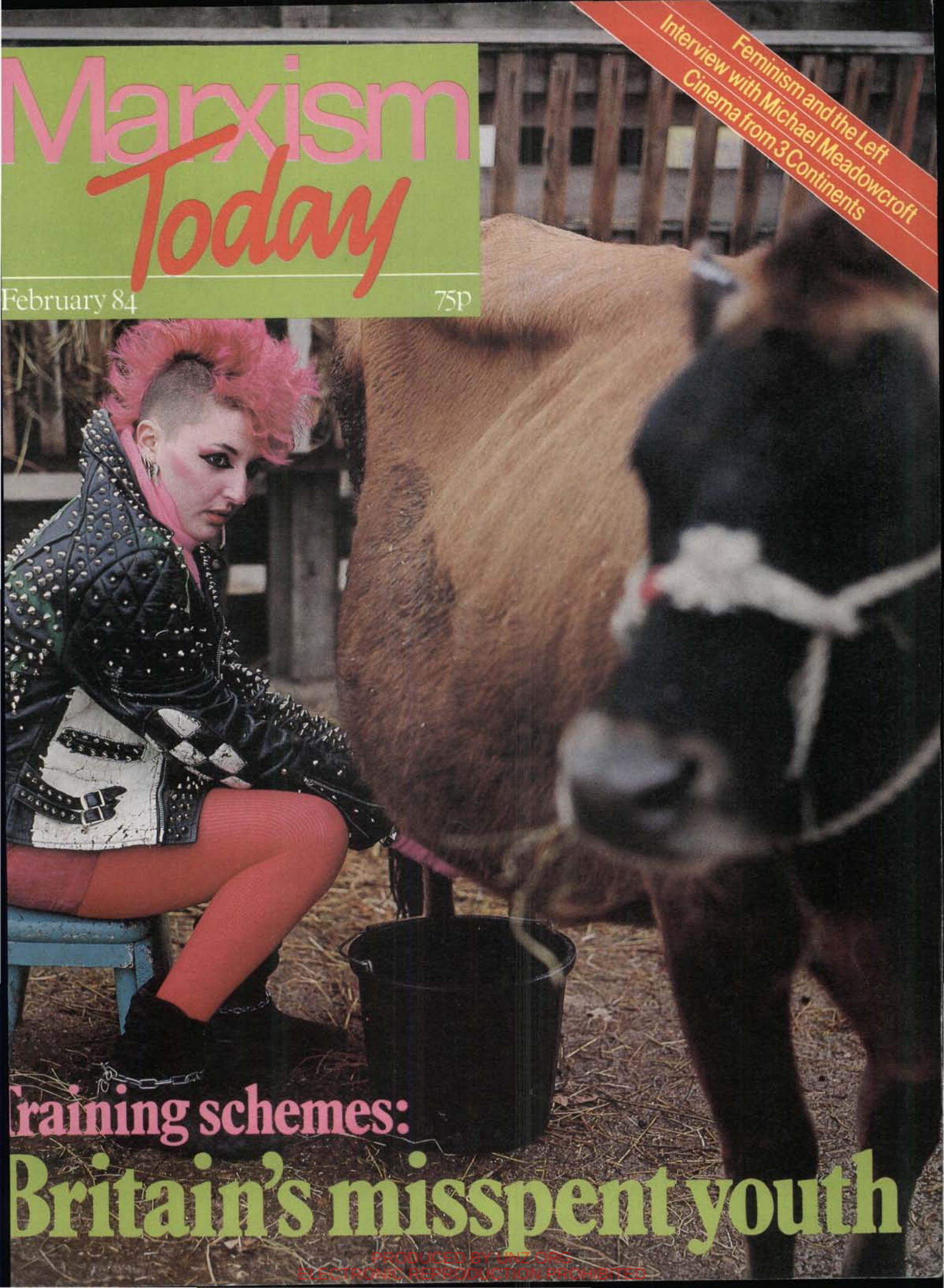
Marxism Today

February 84 75p

Feminism and the Left
Interview with Michael Meadowcroft
Cinema from 3 Continents



Training schemes:
Britain's misspent youth

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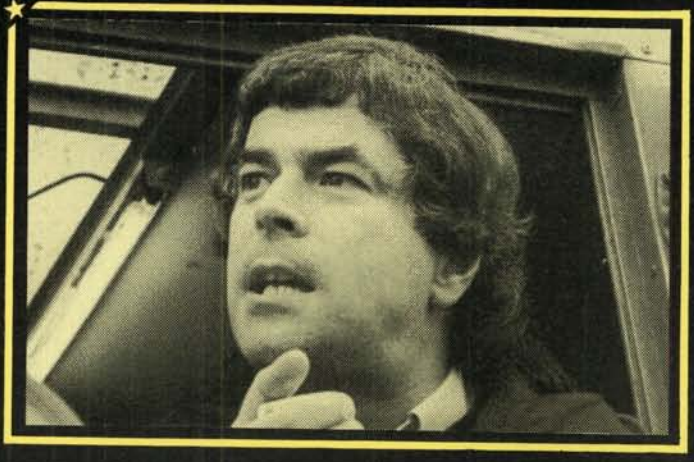

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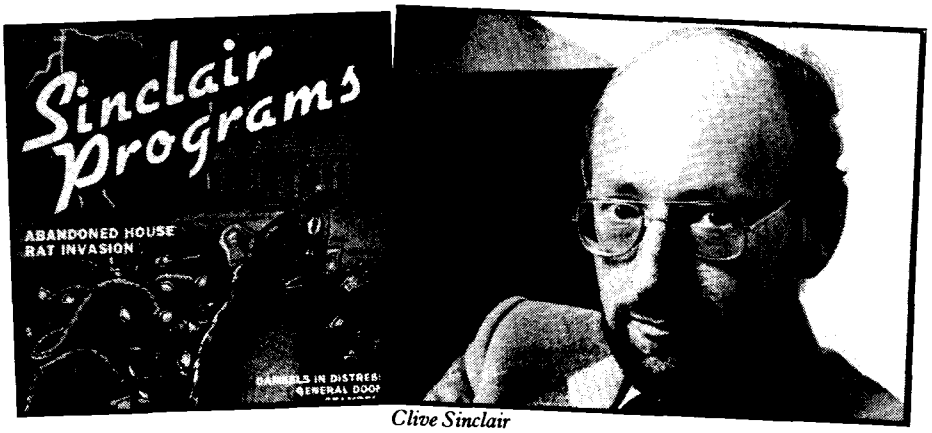
SINCLAIR — A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK?

In the midst of the cut-throat price war currently rocking the personal computer industry to its core, Clive Sinclair seems to lead a charmed life. In the US alone, Atari lost $310m over the last quarter of 1983 and Mattel lost $24m. A bruised Texas Instruments is quitting the market altogether after losing $183m in the last quarter. Here at home the last few months have witnessed the collapse of the Grundy NewBrain computer, the Jupiter Ace and the last minute rescue of the Dragon.

Sinclair though has held his head well above water. His flat-screen pocket television released at the end of September looks set to revolutionise the TV industry. His ZX81 and Spectrum computers have between them sold 1½ million worldwide — over two million if the licensing agreement with Timex in the US is taken into account. The company's turnover for the year to March 31 has doubled to £54.5m, turning in a 26% pre-tax profit of £14m. The Spectrum continues to remain the best-selling personal computer in Britain, and probably something in the region of 100 companies exist to produce programmes, hardware add-ons, books etc, for their users. On the shelves of W H Smith, four magazines alone cater solely for the Sinclair computer user.

Success has made Sinclair a very wealthy man indeed. He owns about 85% of the shares of Sinclair Research, which was valued at £136m in March last year — making him worth around a cool £116 million. Technical innovation, vast economies of scale, cheap foreign labour (from El Salvador among others), and entrepreneurial flair (Sinclair has signed a deal to supply the now obsolete ZX81 to China in kit form for local assembly) — all these have made Sinclair a byword among British home computer users and a cult figure among the hundreds of thousands who use his computers. Now he is set to launch an onslaught on the business micro world — taking on the IBMs of the world.

The prime minister is known to be an admirer of Sinclair's enterprising ability and it was significant that the gift she chose to present to the Japanese premier while on a visit to Japan last year was a Sinclair spectrum. In the Queen's birthday honours he received his reward — becoming Sir Clive. Sinclair's personal history and economic philosophy at least, epitomise the Thatcher doctrine of drive and ambition winning through to triumph in the marketplace.



Clive Sinclair

Sinclair taught himself about electronics during the course of his pretty haphazard schooling. He attended 13 schools in all before leaving at the age of 17 to become a technical author. He churned out 17 books in the next four years. At the age of 22, he borrowed £50 to start a company which sold electronic components by mail order, including a kit for a matchbox-size radio — 'the smallest in the world'. The business soon expanded into hi-fi kits. Within five years the turnover was £100,000.

Within another five years Sinclair was taking the calculator world by storm with the launch of the first true pocket calculator. By 1975, turnover was running into millions of pounds. Sinclair followed up the pocket calculator first with the world's first digital watch — the notoriously unreliable Black Watch. The Black Watch fiasco hit Sinclair's pockets badly and caused him to approach the National Enterprise Board for funding for another pet project — the pocket TV. This partnership was to continue for three years, producing five calculators and two versions of the Microvision. Behind the scenes, Sinclair was working on a computer project, which was eventually to lead to the NewBrain.

But things were meanwhile getting tense between Sinclair and the NEB. The NEB saw the future in instruments, whereas Sinclair saw it in consumer electronics. The split came soon afterwards. The NEB, complaining that the TV had cost them £7,800,000, sold it off to Binatone — who then found that they couldn't make it at a profit. Sinclair took his golden handshake and went off to form Sinclair Research in July 1979. Seven months later he launched the ZX80 computer, selling at under £100 — vastly cheaper than the US models then available. It was followed by the ZX81 a year later and by the Spectrum 13 months afterwards.

Sinclair's impact on Britain with his computers and the technical revolution that had occurred in the previous 15 years or so can be gauged by the following. In 1963, Cambridge University's EDSAC computer, of which it was justifiably proud, was a block of electronic circuitry (valves, mostly) about the size of a Ford Transit van, but much less reliable. It cost tens of thousands of pounds and broke down several times a day. Today the Sinclair ZX81 is the size of a cigar box, retails at £45 and can do everything EDSAC did and more! The following years will see greater leaps forward in technology — with an entire encyclopaedia being stored on a single laser disk, providing instantaneous information on any of a million subjects. Shopping, banking, theatre bookings, mailings etc, will be routinely done from home via computers. Much of education and business will be conducted via home computers — providing 24 hour a day information for the cost of a phone call.

Sinclair sees this as a 'new golden age' — the age of the mind, with more time spent on building culture than on labouring. But what of today's giro generation in this golden age? Sinclair for once has no answer. Today's four million unemployed is not a passing phase of the recession, he says, 'but a trend which will last until the end of the century.' During that time Sinclair expects manufacturing industry 'to shed a further seven million jobs, and for the proportion employed in manufacturing to decline from some 42% of the population to less than 10%'. If the number of unemployed rises to more than 90%, it may be necessary to redefine the term altogether, Sinclair adds.

At the same time, patterns of employment would change, with large firms giving way to small ones. This is central to the Sinclair 'small is beautiful' philosophy. The time it takes to co-ordinate huge numbers of workers ensures that large companies are always technologically behind smaller, more flexible companies, and are therefore less efficient.

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Society's 'pattern of expectation' should be changed, says Sinclair, 'no longer to prepare people for a lifetime's work in major organisations, but to give them the self-reliance for a broader role in smaller groups.' A variation of Tebbit's 'get on your bike' theme? Indeed, Sinclair also echoes the Tebbit advice that young people should go out and found new small businesses if future jobs are to be created. The recession, he adds, is a good time to start, as competition has already cut raw material costs to the bone.

As far as the state is concerned, governments should not interfere in business activities — it only slows things down, says Sinclair — and this applies equally to the development of new activities or the death of existing ones. (Yet Sinclair is not averse to taking the odd 30% government grant when it is offered).

The 'golden age' may already have arrived for Sinclair himself, but for today's jobless school-leavers, Britain's computer whizz-kid has no solutions.

Ron Peters

PENSION FUNDS

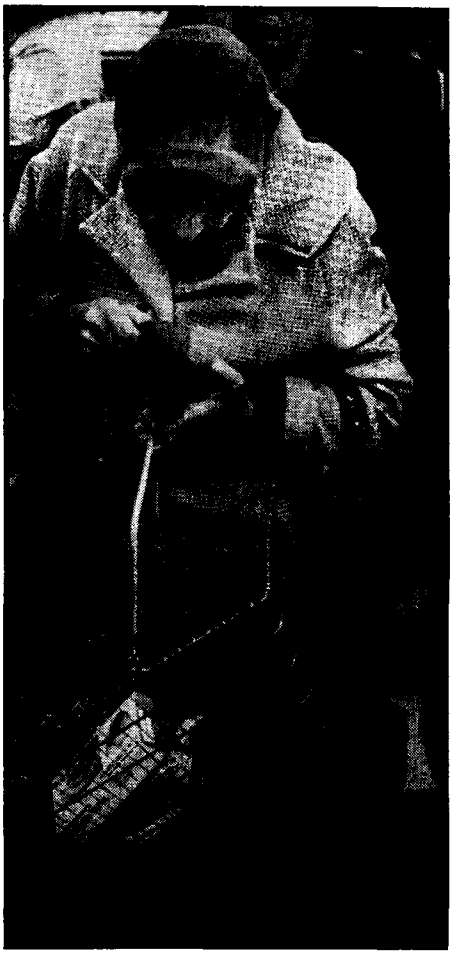
Many people pay 5 or 10% of their earnings into a pension or superannuation scheme today without knowing too much about it, and certainly without realising the extent to which pensions are becoming part of the political battleground in the cabinet.

Pension funds are based on the idea that the contributions you make, together with those made by the employer on your behalf, are invested to produce income which is used to pay for your pension when you retire. The system has a number of faults, the main ones being that they tend to redistribute income towards the higher paid, and that they favour the rare person who stays with one employer, unaffected by redundancy or takeover, throughout their working life, at the expense of more normal people who for one reason or another leave their jobs several times. The schemes are able to provide pensions for the fortunate few on the cheap, because the majority have made contibutions for which they do not see the full value.

After dithering for two years or more, the Government has finally decided to legislate over this second problem. It is likely also that they will force the funds to disclose more information about what they do with the members' money. However, they have also invented a new sort of public body, a public inquiry, with ministers sitting on it, with a more general brief to discuss the future of pensions for the next 40 years.

Why this sudden ferment of activity? The pension funds are very big, it is true, and many of us have large amounts of money tied up in them, with no right to say how or where it is invested. But that has been the case for a long time, as the funds have grown inexorably towards the £100bn mark. The largest of them, the Post Office Fund, is worth several billion pounds, larger than several of the major merchant banks. What has started all these different things happening is that various groups of people have decided that all is not well in the pensions world, though from a number of different points of view and for their own different reasons.

First, the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies has produced a plan for 'portable pensions' which has caught the eye of the Prime Minister and some DHSS ministers, though it is being rubbished by both the civil servants and the insurance companies. The right-wingers believe that current pension funds are an abomination, for two reasons. First, they dislike the collective nature of them — the fact that the young cross-subsidise the old, the healthy the sick, and men women. To the rest of us, our pension scheme may not smack of



socialism, but to these folk, dedicated to 'standing on your own two feet' it does. Secondly, they dislike the power of the big financial institutions just as much as the Left does. They see them as a conspiracy against the small entrepreneur in whose hands, they consider, salvation lies. So their aim is a system where pensions — preferably all pensions, including those currently provided by the state — are saved for by individuals with their own accounts, so that the money can be invested in small businesses, insurance policies, or whatever. What would happen to the individual whose investment in a small business went bust they do not relate.

This proposal is not unlike what has happened in Chile — indeed, one of the proponents of the idea, a Dr Madsden Pirie of the Adam Smith Institute, was unwise enough to talk of the 'Chilean solution' to pensions at a conference not long ago. In Chile, everyone is compelled to take out individual pension policies with the insurance companies, but they can switch their contracts freely between the companies at the end of each year, and this has led to enormous instability in the financial institutions' cash flow.

Since there would be business for the insurance companies in Britain from the Centre for Policy Studies idea, one might expect them to support it. However, the larger, establishment insurers are not keen. Such enterprises are no longer interested primarily in insurance — a company like the Prudential is a conglomerate financial institution, with insurance being only one small part of its activities. Anything which disturbs the smoothness of their cash flow makes planning difficult, and is therefore to be deplored.

Meanwhile, other groups have their worries, for other reasons. Civil servants at the Department of Trade and Industry have responsibility for keeping an eye on the insurance market and other places where small investors can lose their money. Over the last year, they have seen a number of scandals, first among the commodity brokers and later in Lloyds of London, the biggest insurance market in the world, who had assured everyone that they could police themselves very well but turned out not to in practice. Pension funds similarly are not tightly controlled under the law. Theoretically they are ruled by a framework of trust law going back to the middle ages. This though is too vague, and too difficult to enforce, to be any real protection. The DTI has had a Professor Gower, who started off as one of Mrs Thatcher's pals but is probably less so now,

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looking into the protection of investors for some time now, and being a man of logical mind he finds it difficult to see why insurance companies should be heavily regulated and pension funds *not at all*.

The pensions interests are thus trying hard to head off both him and the DHSS, who have at last convinced ministers that the bad treatment of 'early leavers' can only be dealt with by legislation, rather than leaving it to the altruism of employers. So they have produced a red herring in the idea that we 'cannot afford' in this country to pay decent pensions. If we stop cheating early leavers, they say, we will have to cut the benefits of those who stay, otherwise in the future pensioners will be too well off, and the country won't be able to pay for them. There is a grain of truth in their argument, because the pension funding system relies on economic growth and positive results from real investment — rather than buying and selling second hand stocks and shares — so that without economic growth there will be problems paying for pensions, unless there is some heavy redistribution. Rather than face the question of how to create real investment, as the TUC have been demanding, the vested interests in the pension world prefer to make future pensioners live in poverty, as current ones do.

There is no doubt that the pension funds, and the financial institutions who manage their money could force the Government to change its economic policies, if they wished to. Many pension funds have trade unionists sitting as trustees, but they tend to be over-awed by the smooth talking of their City advisers and follow their orthodoxy. The funds, together with the insurance companies by whom much of their money is controlled, are the major buyers of the gilt edged securities the Government issues to finance its borrowing. In 1976, it was the activities of the financial institutions that created the 'crisis' that brought in the IMF and scuppered Labour's economic policies. But as supporters of Thatcherism those who control the pension funds will not take action to ensure that there is the economic growth the country needs. Instead, they will be pouring in evidence to Norman Fowler's 'super inquiry' to show that the promises made to future pensioners are not 'too generous'. Since those future pensioners are all of us, it is to be hoped that other forces, not least the TUC and individual unions, who have been taking a much higher profile on pensions matters lately, will contest their views.

Jane Harris

YOUR SHEKEL OR YOUR WALLET?

A current joke in Israel asks; 'What is it like to live under hyper-inflation? When you leave behind a wallet full of shekels and you return to find the wallet stolen and the money left untouched.'

What is new in the country is a widespread belief, corroborated by public opinion polls, that the government has lost control over the economy, is unable to steer it and that a crash is almost unavoidable. Opinions differ about the exact timing and the severity of the blow. Predictions vary from between a few months to two years, and between 'we'll pull out somehow' to 'catastrophe'. The future depends, however, largely on the US government and its willingness to bail Israel out.

The two most glaring problems for Israel's economy are hyper-inflation and a massive foreign debt. Government spending is the root cause of both problems. Since its inception in 1948, the Israeli regime has been able to pursue economic and political targets beyond the resources available from the Israeli economy. The deficit has been made up by donations and favoured loans from zionist Jews abroad, by grants and loans from the West German government — the 'reparations' agreement — and since 1971, by huge and unprecedented aid in credits, grants and loans from the US. US aid to Israel has exceeded its aid to Korea in the 1950s, to Vietnam in the 1960s and roughly equalled aid given under the Marshall Plan after World War II. These injections of foreign resources have enabled Israel until recently to maintain a high rate of economic growth and a Western standard of living, and to build a massive military machine.

The 1973 war, the oil crisis and the settlement projects in the 1967-occupied territories increased further the already high rate of inflation and the level of government borrowing abroad. With inflation rising in the West, it seemed for a while that borrowing at fixed rates was a bargain. In 1977, the Likud, headed by Begin, gained power. One of its few novel economic measures was to abolish government restriction on individuals holding foreign currency. This resulted in the opening up of a new avenue for private banks and individuals to borrowing abroad.

Government expenditure is not only financed by borrowing abroad. Israel has one of the highest taxation rates in the world. Besides, the government has built a huge internal debt (through bonds) and when this has not been enough, it has syphoned more resources by printing money. At the moment, Israel's foreign debt stands at 22bn US dollars (more than 1bn has been added in the last year alone). The current balance of payments deficit is 5bn dollars. The government's internal debt burden is currently around 32bn US dollars, and the rate of inflation has increased from around 130% in 1980 to its current figure of 200%. This is the economic background to the present crisis.

In 1981 Begin won a second term of office, riding to power on the crest of a populist vote due, partly, to the deliberate policy of reducing tariffs and surcharges on imported durable goods, sending the country on a shopping spree. Despite the growing burden of foreign debt and high inflation, the Likud persisted in large deficit spending on its settlement projects, and on military expenditure culminating in the war in Lebanon. The present economic situation is thus the result of a deliberate political decision to buy the Likud time, a policy which had a delayed economic price-fuse attached to it. The coincidence of the impasse in Lebanon with the current economic crisis indicates the total failure of both military and economic planks of Likud policy.

In response, Likud last year reshuffled its cabinet; first to go, under American pressure, was General Sharon, architect of the Lebanon war. The prime minister himself sank into a deep depression, and resigned last summer. Most recent victim was Finance Minister Aridor. The excuse given for his departure was the leaking by the press of his plan to curtail inflation at a stroke by the ingenious idea of making the US dollar an official currency, but underlying the move was the crisis facing Israel's economy. Israel now has a new government, still headed by the Likud, but shorn of its glory, and stumbling for solutions both in Lebanon and the economy.

October was for many Israelis the worst economic month in memory. Due to rampant inflation, money cannot be saved even for short periods in current and savings accounts as these bear nominal but in fact negative real interest. In an attempt to preserve the value of their savings, Israelis of all walks of life are forced to invest in more speculative ventures, in shares, index linked bonds, unit trusts, etc. Most favoured, until recently, seemed to be bank shares, safeguarded by the government. When in October public expectations of an impending devaluation of the shekel led to extensive sales of bank shares (in order to purchase US dollars), the fall in

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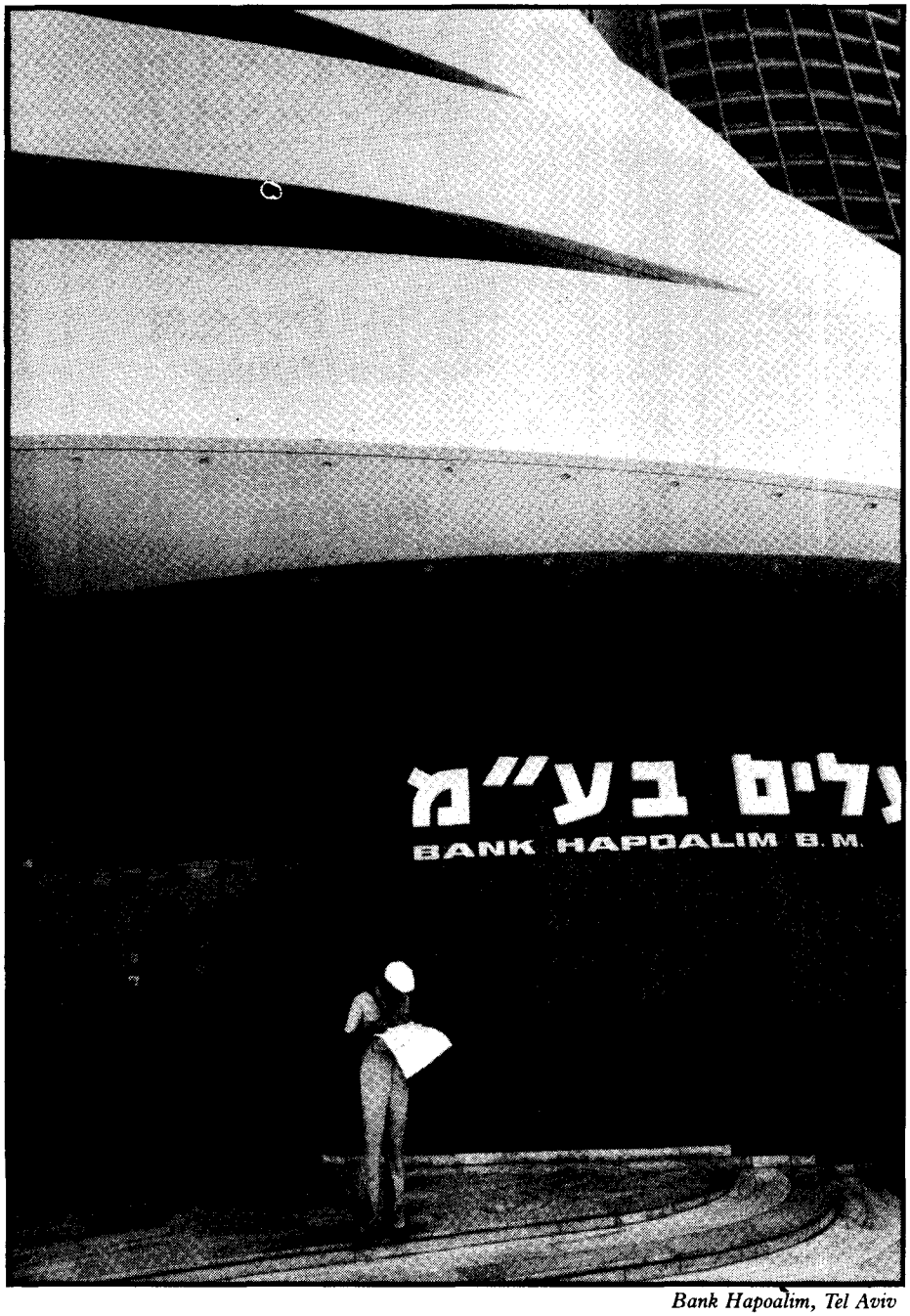

Bank Hapoalim, Tel Aviv

the value of these shares affected a large section of small savers, including pensioners, who lost a large portion of their savings. And the subsequent devaluation measure was coupled with a crippling rise of consumer prices of more than 50%.

This twin movement hit at a stroke the waged population, who could not pass the price increases on to others. Wages in Israel are index-linked and the indexation is calculated quarterly. If inflation increases by less than 30%, the level of compensation is 85% of the increase. Recent increases, however, were so large that this mechanism, unique to my knowledge, was not adequate, as the quarterly period of calculation was too long. Workers' committees are now demanding to have wages paid fortnightly, indexation calculated monthly, and full compensation for inflation.

A significant problem has been that the Histadrut, the Labour Party-led Israeli equivalent of the TUC, has flinched from radical action to avoid a general confrontation with the government. In the last month, however, a tide of strikes has swept the country. A port strike prevented agricultural exports from reaching the Christmas markets in Europe. Copper miners in the far south have clashed violently with the police over the threatened closure of the mines. A general strike took place in the southern town of Eilat. Strikes have also occurred in several public services, and a strike in the education system was only temporarily averted. This wave of strikes is bound to increase as the current measures to erode wages contine.

A second front is now opening over the issue of redundancies. From 1966 until recently Israel had practically no unemployment, due to the large section of the Jewish population employed in the military and security sector. The large public sector too is less affected by cyclical market movements. Low unemployment was also a result of the high rate of growth, which has only slackened in the last few years. Unemployment in Israel is a sensitive issue not only because of its relative novelty; it is immediately associated with an increase in emigration and a decrease in immigration, thus affecting the country's demographic balance with the Palestinians — a touchy ideological point for the zionist state. Of late, unemployment has nevertheless started to rise and is currently 5.5% and rising.

A particular problem in this context is the Palestinian labour force from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which represents about 8% of the country's workforce. They will be the first to suffer from redundancies and although by law they are made to pay full social security contributions, they are not entitled to unemployment pay and other welfare benefits, but are treated as 'guest workers'.

The new government, headed by Shamir with its new Defence Minister Arens and new Finance Minster Orgad, seems incapable of implementing any orchestrated economic plan. Governmental coalition factions will resist any curtailment in their fiefs, thus making it impossible to reduce significantly government spending, the key to any economic solution. The narrow base of the coalition means that it is enough for one of its smaller components, the ultra nationalists, one of the religious parties, or the oriental Jews' party, to defect and thus cause the government's downfall.

The Labour Party too is not eager to pick up the helm now. Its leadership is split, its policies are not so different from the Likud with perhaps one exception, the establishment of new settlements in some parts of the West Bank. Labour knows that to take up government in mid-term at this particular conjuncture would bring down upon them the wrath of the people at the next elections, as they would have to introduce the painful measures which the Likud has flinched from implementing. It has been a warm winter in Israel, not only weather-wise; but the spring and summer are going to get much hotter.

Avi Ehrlich

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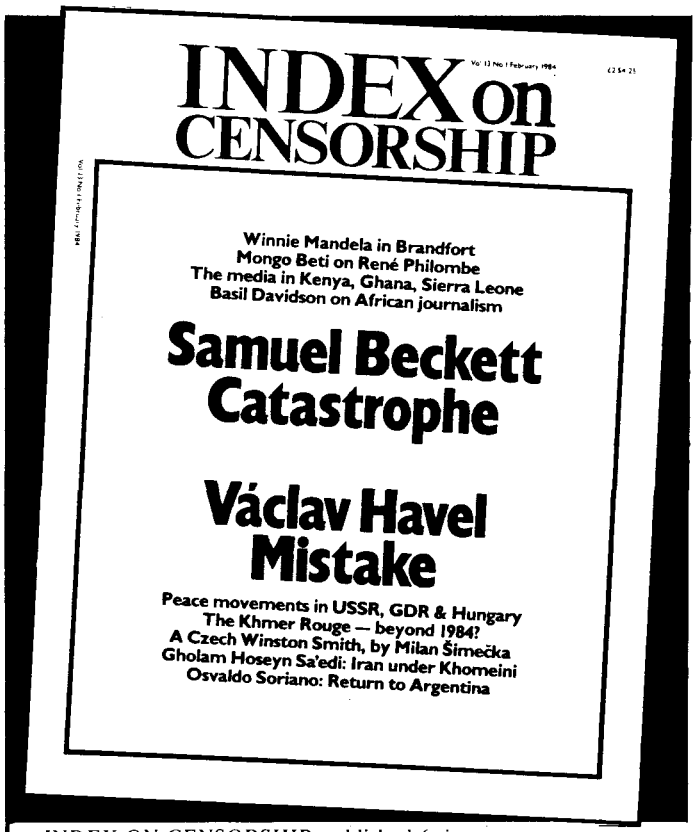
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Women now see society and politics very differently from 30 years ago. But the labour movement is in danger of missing the boat.

Jean Gardiner

The Gender Trap

Over the last twenty years women have experienced dramatic changes in their lives and in their perceptions of themselves in relation to men and to society as a whole. Men's lives have been affected too, although generally not to the extent or in the ways that women have come to demand or expect. Within the labour movement the response has been at best slow and somewhat uncomprehending. To the extent that debates have taken place on the implications of gender changes in society, most of the emphasis has been placed on the need to integrate feminist demands into the policies of the Left. Important as this is it is an approach which merely scratches the surface of deeper structural problems related to the traditions and culture of political life on the Left. There are no easy solutions to these problems and what follows will not conclude with a list of proposals for action. We need first to stand back, reflect and try to comprehend.

Women and men: shifting relations

On the Left some attention has been paid to the dramatic rise in the proportion of women in the labour force from 31% in 1951 to 40% in 1981. Such a major change in the gender composition of wage earners has important implications for the industrial structure of the labour movement, and also, for that matter, for the relations between women and men outside the workplace. The composition of trade union membership has altered dramatically. Less than one in five union members were women in 1951 and now nearly one in three are women. Although total trade union membership has been falling in recent years, male members have been lost at a faster rate than female members. This reflects the relatively greater loss of men's jobs.

> the labour movement in this country retains its traditional masculine image

Yet to date, this massive influx of women into trade union membership has had, in all but a very small number of cases, virtually no impact on the structure and policies of unions or on the composition of leading committees and officers. Women have rarely become actively involved in their unions and consequently their needs have been given low priority in the course of collective bargaining. Increasing unionisation of women has, for example, done nothing to improve women's pay relative to men's.

Trade unions have learned how to recruit women (although still proportionately less than men) but are at best struggling to learn how to represent and involve them. The general failure of the labour movement to come to terms with women's increased presence in the workplace is partly a result of its inability to grasp the implications of other important and irreversible changes that have taken place in women's position in society.

Women are no longer subordinate in relation to men. This is an aspect of the general erosion of deferential attitudes that

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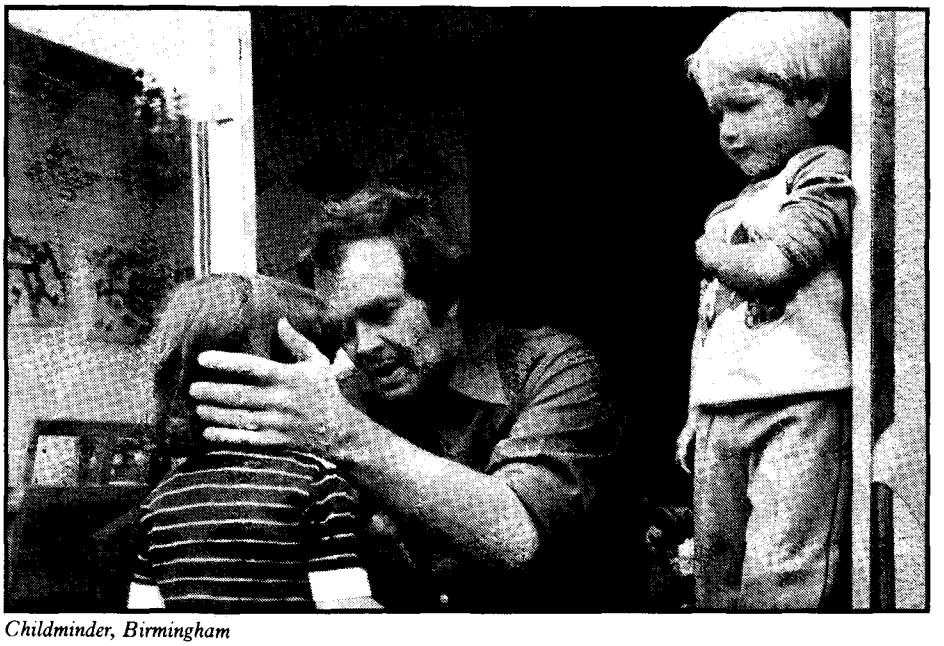

Childminder, Birmingham

others have noted[1] but it has its own ideological and material origins as well. To understand these we must look at changes within marriage and the family on the one hand and at the impact of the women's movement on the other.

In the last fifteen to twenty years women have begun to gain control over two crucial aspects of their lives: fertility and marriage. The availability of the pill and safe abortion by the end of the 1960s opened up for women the experience of choosing whether and when to have children. This was particularly important for young single women, fewer of whom would subsequently be propelled into marriage through unintended pregnancy. Significantly marriage rates began to decline in the early 1970s for the first time since the Second World War. Cohabitation as a prelude or alternative to marriage began to become not only popularly practised but socially accepted. The proportion of women who lived with their husbands before marriage rose from 3% in the late 1960s to 20% in the late 1970s. Nine out of ten young people now feel that living together before marriage is acceptable and a majority of people aged 65 or over agree.[2]

Women's expectations of marriage have increased as the scope for them to opt out of an unsatisfactory marriage has widened. Women's greater financial independence, the availability of supplementary benefit for single parents and the liberalisation of divorce law by the 1969 Act have increased women's control over the terms on which marriage is acceptable to them. And increasingly this has meant women rejecting unsatisfactory marriages. One in three marriages today will probably end in divorce. Seven out of ten divorces now filed are initiated by women.

Women no longer accept the traditional gender divison between breadwinner and housekeeper. The fact that women are now breadwinners themselves is obviously an important influence in this erosion of traditional values. Women who have been out at work, even for part-time hours, and who come home to the cooking, housework, childcare and washing are much less likely to be waiting for husbands' return with slippers and tea at the ready.

Masculinity in question

In researching in the West Midlands for a recent television series 'About Men' the film makers found that nearly all of the 150 men they spoke to felt uncomfortable in some way or other with the traditional image of masculinity they had grown up with. Some felt inadequate by it or unable economically to fulfil it; others were under pressure from a partner to change it. There was awareness of a contradiction between the public face of masculinity at work or among male friends and the private vulnerability that men experienced.

Women's higher expectations of men, reinforced by the feminist movement, have also created a widespread awareness amongst men about their own sexism. The will to change, or the knowledge about how to, is of course much less pervasive and rarely addressed in public. Men remain sadly inarticulate about their own experience of changes in gender relations.

What tangible evidence is there that men have responded to pressures from women to assume a greater domestic role? Back in 1973, sociologists Young and Wilmott regarded it as a breakthrough towards equality in the home that 72% of the married men in their London survey 'helped' their wives in the home in some way other than washing up at least once a week. At the same time feminists pointed out how such evidence demonstrated the limits of changes that had taken place in the sexual division of labour in the home.

Men's relationship to children has been gradually changing but again in very limited ways. Most men are now present at the birth of their child. Men's leisure activities are probably more geared to children than they used to be. Playing or watching football or cricket has given way to family outings in the car. Men pushing pushchairs or transporting babies in baby carriers are common sights today. To men these may seem like significant changes because they represent an erosion of traditional images of masculinity. To women the changes still seem insignificant because they represent no shift in the basic responsibility for worrying about and caring for children.

The difference in the number of hours in paid employment worked by men and women continues to perpetuate the traditional division of responsibility. Increasing numbers of women have worked part-time, currently about 40% of the total female labour force. The average hours worked by men have declined slightly over the last 20 years but remain at a level that precludes them taking a major share in childcare responsibilities. Among male manual workers average hours worked declined from 47 in 1962 to 43 in 1982. Moreover men with dependent children tend to work longer hours than men without. One study found that married men under 30 with children worked four times as much paid overtime as similarly aged childless husbands.

The impact of unemployment

It is likely that men feel the impact of the changes in gender relations that have been taking place to a much greater extent when they lose their jobs through unemployment or ill health and cease to have the role of primary wage earner. Although the wives of unemployed men are less likely to have paid employment than the wives of men in work, there are more and more married couples where the wife is now the sole wage earner.

Whether and how men come to terms with this change in roles will obviously vary. But there are men in this situation, including some who assume that they will never be wage earners again, who have been forced by unemployment to share some of women's experience and responsibilities as caring people. Because of unemployment

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there are more men in society today looking after children and grandchildren and visiting elderly relations. And at least some of them are recognising the value of this experience and regretting an organisation of work and value system which in the past excluded them from any caring role.

Such changes in gender relations within the family resulting from unemployment may be relatively rare. Elsewhere the effect of husbands without jobs may be that the traditional model of the male breadwinner and dependent wife becomes romanticised or that the husband cannot bring himself to break with the habits of a lifetime. Conflict and physical violence in the home may even be exacerbated.

However mass unemployment has made more and more men as well as women begin to ask fundamental questions about how work is structured in relation to life and responsibilities outside the workplace. As doubt has spread about the possibility of returning to full employment as it operated in the past, questions have begun to be asked about the desirability of the traditional male model of work. And these questions have not just been asked by feminists. A working life which lasts from the age of 16 to 65, consisting of working weeks of 40+ hours, not only prevents men from sharing responsibility for children or elderly relatives but also greatly limits the scope for leisure and personal development. For most people, of course, it also limits the extent to which they are willing to get involved in politics.

The Left has as yet been unwilling to engage with these changing attitudes about work because of a fear that to accept their existence would undermine the fight for jobs. The Right on the other hand has effectively exploited the popular conviction that no return to the past is possible. They have encouraged people to believe erroneously that nothing can be done by governments in the short term to reduce unemployment.

If the labour movement is to succeed in taking popular attitudes to unemployment in a leftward direction it must evolve an alternative strategy which recognises the need to reorganise work around caring and leisure instead of subordinating everything else to the demands of work. The discussions that have taken place around a feminist alternative strategy represent the only real attempt so far to begin to address these problems.

Women as a political force

Just as women have discovered new confidence and independence in relation to men, they have also evolved their own kinds of collective organisation and solidarity rounded in their experience as women. The feminist movement of the 1970s and the many women's organisations and campaigns that originated from it show the full extent to which women have evolved their own political culture and the degree to which this diverges from the traditions of left wing politics.

seven out of ten divorces now filed are initiated by women

Feminism emphasises the need for women to organise, to learn from and represent themselves, and to develop structures that are neither hierarchical nor bureaucratic. It is not about women fighting for an equal place in men's world, even though equal pay and equal opportunities continue to be important and unrealised demands. There has always been a recognition that equality with men is unattainable unless there is a radical change in men's relationship to work, to parenting and to other family responsibilities. Feminism has greatly increased women's confidence in themselves because it has legitimised women's own experience which differs in so many ways from men's and has shown that men have much to learn from women.

The feminist movement succeeded in politicising a whole range of issues of crucial importance to women but previously completely ignored by the Left. Male violence against women, abortion, sexual harassment are examples of this.

At the same time, feminism must be seen as a much more general movement amongst women since the late 1960s. This has been a period during which women's self-activity and organisation has begun to establish itself in the community and in the workplace.

In the community women have organised around local political issues such as childcare, play facilities, roads and schools. Support for such organisation has generally come from community workers and political parties have rarely been directly involved.

[1] See Stuart Hall 'The Culture Gap' *Marxism Today* January 1984.

[2] Study Commission on the Family, *Families in the Future.*

NHS Workers Demonstration, August, 1982

Women blockade the gates — Greenham Common

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In the workplace women have been responsible for organising some important trade union struggles starting with the 1968 machinists' strike at Ford for equal grading which initiated the campaign for equal pay and culminating in more recent years with the small number of successful struggles against redundancies, notably Plessey-Bathgate and Lee Jeans.

Ironically it is the segregation of women at work into women-only jobs — together with the broader changes just discussed — that has forced women to organise themselves, given them the confidence to conduct their own battles and shown them what a group of women on their own can achieve.

In the 1980s new independent areas of women's politics have emerged in which feminists have succeeded in constructing alliances with a very wide range of women. The women's peace movement and especially the women of Greenham Common provide the most outstanding example of this.

Women and the labour movement

Many women have been politicised through their experience of organising with other women. They have looked to the labour movement for a channel through which the self-confidence and collective solidarity they have established could have a wider impact on society as a whole. In the mid-70s many women joined the Communist Party and Trotskyist groups. In the late 70s and early 80s many turned to the Labour Party. For other women who were members of left political parties before the women's liberation movement emerged, feminism brought new confidence to bring women's politics to the forefront of left wing political life.

There are of course many more women outside the labour movement whose support and involvement the Left will have to win if it is to reverse the political decline it has suffered in recent years. In the 1983 General Election for example, there was a particularly sharp switch of women's votes from the Labour Party to the Alliance.

> conveying the message that politics is not supposed to be enjoyable or attractive

The impact that women have on the labour movement from within will directly affect its appeal to women outside. At present there is no doubt that the labour movement in this country retains its traditional masculine image despite the ways in which society as a whole has been changing.

In the Labour Party as well as the Communist Party there are areas of the country, particularly some of the major cities, where it is the case that women have begun to have a significant impact. Women's sections and women's groups have been revived and politicised. There has been an increase in the proportion of women on influential committees. At a local government level women in the Labour Party working alongside women outside have begun to have an impact on policy, especially in the London area.

However the impact of women has been very uneven across the country and we are still left with an overriding impression that as a whole the political life and priorities of the Left have barely been touched. Women's issues may now be acknowledged as important in a way that previously, they were not. This is reflected in Neil Kinnock's decision to appoint Jo Richardson as the first shadow spokeswoman on women's issues. Yet women's issues go on being seen as something separate from the central political issues and priorities.

Even when there is an awareness within the labour movement of the importance of more women becoming involved, there is

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rarely an appreciation that women have much to contribute to mainstream politics and that many of them will be ground down and demoralised if not given an opportunity for their own experience to be expressed.

Women have increased their participation in the labour force and trade unions. Yet the workplace issues which women feel to be crucial for them, for example low pay, access to training, flexible and shorter hours, are still peripheral to labour movement industrial strategies.

The politics of life outside the workplace continues to have very low priority on the Left, despite the obvious fact that paid employment is not the most important thing in life for the vast majority of the population, especially women. The vast experience that women have in this area has barely begun to be tapped by the Left, although it could provide an important key to reversing the political marginalisation that the Left has experienced in recent years.

Homeworker, South London

Cultural traditions of labour movement

Many of the cultural traditions of the labour movement are alien to most women as well as many men. There is a culture associated with political meetings ranging from seating arrangements to styles of debate which appears old fashioned, stifling and inappropriate to almost anyone who has not grown up with it.

In the area of trade union education it has now been generally accepted that most women as well as most men function a lot more effectively in small groups. Discussion is much richer and participation much wider. Yet elsewhere in the labour movement there is still much resistance to small group methods. Perhaps this is because people see the role of meetings largely in terms of taking decisions and deciding policy rather than in terms of coming to grips with the problems which so often prevent those decisions from being carried out.

The traditional style of debate on the Left assumes and fosters a clash of ideas: putting motions, speakers for and against. Men, especially men from an industrial trade union background, often judge the success of a meeting by the sharpness of disagreement expressed. Women are skilled at developing and expanding discussion in ways that are conciliatory and open ended and often find the antagonism that is fostered in political debate un-

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helpful and unnecessary.

The labour movement continues to be steeped in traditional male working class culture. Outside the workplace it still follows the pattern of what used to be the norm for working class men's leisure activities. For most men leisure-time was spent outside the home, in all male company, in pubs or clubs. Labour movement organisations rooted themselves in these venues because they were familiar and attractive to the men who formed them and to those they set out to involve. Women traditionally were excluded from pubs and clubs and even today rarely venture into them except in the safety of numbers or in the company of a man. Yet in many areas of the country, labour movement politics is still conducted in pubs or adjourned to them. And working men's clubs, which still have close links with the labour movement in some areas, have not yet accepted women as full members.

It is interesting to compare the distinct cultural traditions that women bring with them which publicly only surface generally at women's events. An all-day event organised by women will invariably be interspersed by a good cheap lunch provided on the premises, collectively eaten over informal conversation rather than a trip to the pub.

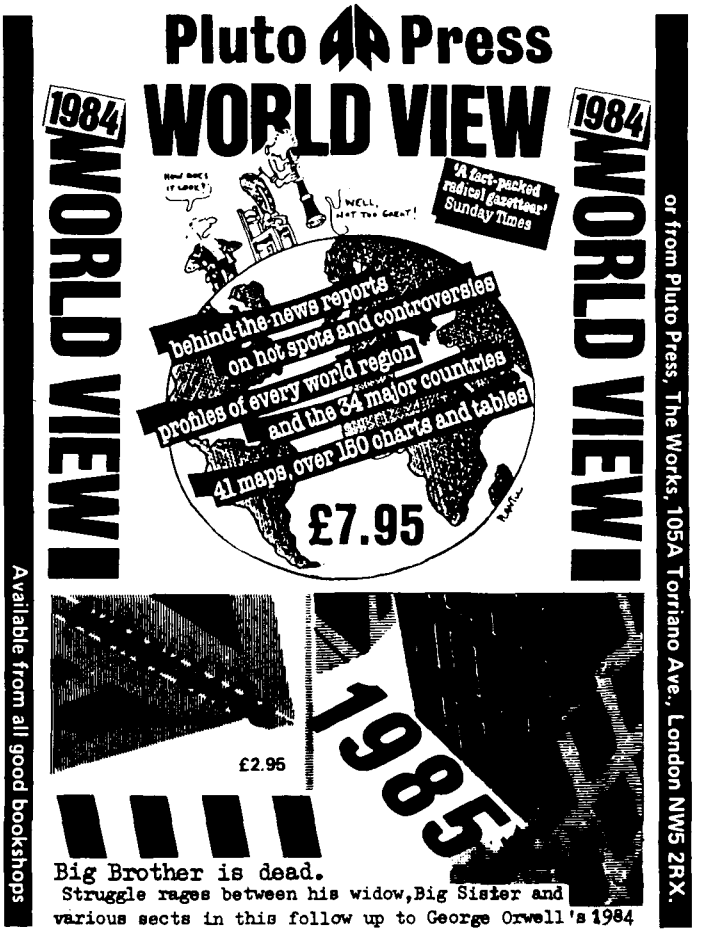
It is of course not just women that left wing political culture is often out of touch with. Male leisure activities have altered and diversified a great deal since the formative years of the labour movement. Homes are generally more comfortable than they used to be and, with television and video, entertainment has become more home-centred and less sexually segregated.

the politics of life outside the workplace continues to have a very low priority on the left

Yet labour movement organisations still often meet in cold meeting halls with hard chairs, conveying the message that politics is not supposed to be enjoyable or attractive. In this respect the cultural events organised in recent years on the Left — such as the Communist Party open-air festivals — providing entertainment for all ages, women, men, and children represent an important breakthrough. Unfortunately they have left mainstream political life largely unaffected.

The relationship between women and men in society as a whole has changed irreversibly. Women have discovered a collective solidarity and independent women's politics which as yet has found little scope for expression within the mainstream of labour movement politics. Many women who became involved in the Left in recent years have since withdrawn. The existence of an autonomous women's politics outside the labour movement offers women an alternative to the traditional left definition of what politics is about and of how political life is to belived. Coming to terms with what the Left has to learn from women's experience must be an essential ingredient of any serious attempt to tackle the problems facing the left today.

A central feature of the labour movement's crisis is a *crisis of representivity* — its ability to represent in a full sense the sections it aspires to speak on behalf of. Women are central to this — they are now far more active subjects of society and politics than was the case 30 years ago. There can be no serious coming to terms with the labour movement's decline without a new relationship between it and women. That is partly about policies and programmes — it is equally about culture, priorities and day-to-day practices at all levels. □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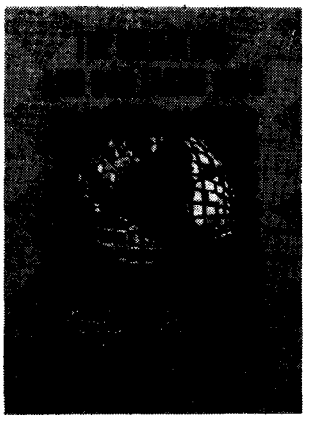

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The New (Liberal) Left

Interview with Michael Meadowcroft

by Paul Olive and Sarah Benton

Michael Meadowcroft MP, 41, is a Liberal Whip and parliamentary spokesman on health and social security. Elected in the June 1983 election, he won what was expected to be the Labour seat of Leeds West. He is widely seen as being on the left of the Liberal Party.

It's very unusual, if not unique since the war, for a Liberal to win a seat from Labour without special circumstances such as a byelection or a Tory standing down. I don't know how you would account for this?

I think it's a combination of factors, and far less personal than some people make out, except of course that I had been 15 years in that area. That was one aspect, the longevity of it. Secondly, West Leeds is unusual in not having been too ravaged by redevelopment. The particular Liberal style that we try to foster in West Leeds of identification with the community and with its own power to regenerate itself was easier to do there than in other areas. Thirdly, the Labour Party never expected to lose. Even on polling day they sent workers to adjacent constituencies.

Also I think there was recognition of a considerable commitment by a Liberal team who had an idealism about their politics and who wanted to express it in non-state terms. We would always endeavour, whatever movement was rising in Leeds, to be part of it. The Stop the 70 Tour campaign, for instance, was organised from the Liberal office in Leeds. Also there has been change from movements which have been concerned about very tangible things, to movements more concerned about views of society, such as peace, Greenham, and above all, the women's movement. And those are things which tie in far better with Liberalism than they do with statism and Labourism.

The last feature is that we fortunately still have a lot of Liberal clubs: there are 19 Liberal clubs in Leeds, six of them in West Leeds. On any Saturday night, there are a couple of thousand people in those clubs and we were able, without appearing to be an elitist outside force, to be in those clubs and part of them, where people, working class people, feel very strong.

Given those special factors, it sounds rather as if the prospects for Liberals in other Labour seats up and down the country are not especially bright.

I'm not sure that's true. There has been an incredible turn-round of electoral support for parties in Leeds, as elsewhere, and West Leeds is the first of the six Leeds constituencies to go. We were starting from a vote in the whole city of Leeds in 1968, when I was first elected to the council, of 4.8% across the city. The last local election produced a vote of 31% across the city, with 30% in the general election. We have now tackled the biggest problem for Liberals — to demonstrate you can win.

You're known for your hostility to the politics of the Social Democrats, but isn't it true that there would have been no breakthrough without the Alliance?

The problem with the Alliance is that where you are in a weak position it pulls you up to an average level; but where you are strong it tends to pull you down. I am very much of the opinion that we would not have won West Leeds if we had backed the Alliance and all its trappings. We decided that we would not have Alliance on the ballot paper, we would not invite Alliance people to come to West Leeds to speak, and we would not express any love or affection for the idea of Alliance in any kind of political terms. That did us a considerable amount of good and we would not have won had we taken the opposite view. Now the Alliance would get the two parties to maybe the 26% it got it to this time. But the problem for a libertarian left party is how you break through that barrier of 20% plus, which we got to in 1974. There is a situation where the public see you as worthy local parties, but don't see you as a national party with a consistent viewpoint; that is the barrier to jump.

> The debate I want to see is between people who regard themselves as radical and progressive, to see whether they do stick in ghettoes

Don't you feel that one of the difficulties people have in seeing the Liberals as a national party (as opposed to groups of community activists) is because of your ambivalence about the state, which is the national body through which change is effected, through which the multinationals are resisted, foreign relations are conducted and the national wealth is in theory redistributed?

If you believe that the state has the power you attribute to it then of course that will loom large in determining your political sympathies. But if you believe, looking at what has happened in the last 40 years, that the state does not have as much power as people ascribe to it and that the power rests much more with the collective, or with the commune, or the co-operative, or the geographic community. . .

That it does, or it should do?

That it does. If you argue that position, which is the libertarian position, you will have a far lower priority for the state.

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Let me give an example. Either you have to say we want nothing to do with multinationals, and set up an entirely state owned system, or you have to have a powerful state that can attract industry and shift it around the country to the places where it's most needed, don't you? If you are reluctant to see the state playing this important role, are the Liberals not in a weak position?

If the agenda we are faced with at any given time in the economic cycle forces us into decisions which on the face of them are illiberal, they are the decisions that you may well take on that agenda at that time, particularly if you are in a governmental situation where people are pressing, as a high priority, to take that kind of state action and to intervene in the process. What I am trying to talk more about is the view of society which I am working towards, as opposed to the current agenda. I wouldn't necessarily rule out direction of industry in the way you're saying, if that is the most pressing need at a time of crisis. But it is interesting that Alec Nove, in his fascinating book *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, does not reach the kind of solution you're talking about. He really comes down in favour of a kind of Mondragon enterprise writ large everywhere, where people come into a cooperative situation and bargain away differentials. So many of the movements we're in now, are non-hierarchical, rejecting patriarchy, rejecting discipline, rejecting aggressions.

But on what scale can that really operate? On the scale of a national industry, for example the mines? I have seen suggestions from the Right, only half-joking, that since the mines are losing a lot of money, they should be sold or even given to the miners.

There will have to be a long compromise between different kinds of work, and probably some will always be organised in a 'national grid' way. I still go for the channel tunnel, or renewal of old sewers or whatever it is, a lot of which must be done nationally, but at the same time if you offer resources to small groups there is an infinite amount of work you will pick up with very little subsidy. But I am very anxious to develop a debate with the statist Left, and I am not using that in a pejorative sense, to say, Look, I agree with you, Liberals have a very defective view of the state, but I think you have very defective view of the community.

Why do we not learn from each other, or find some common ground which will defeat the reactionary view which is counter to both? I think, for instance, Liberals are very weak on trade unionism, because of their tradition, whereas we have a healthier view of ecological perspectives than does the Labour Left.

Do you view the SDP as part of the 'statist Left'?

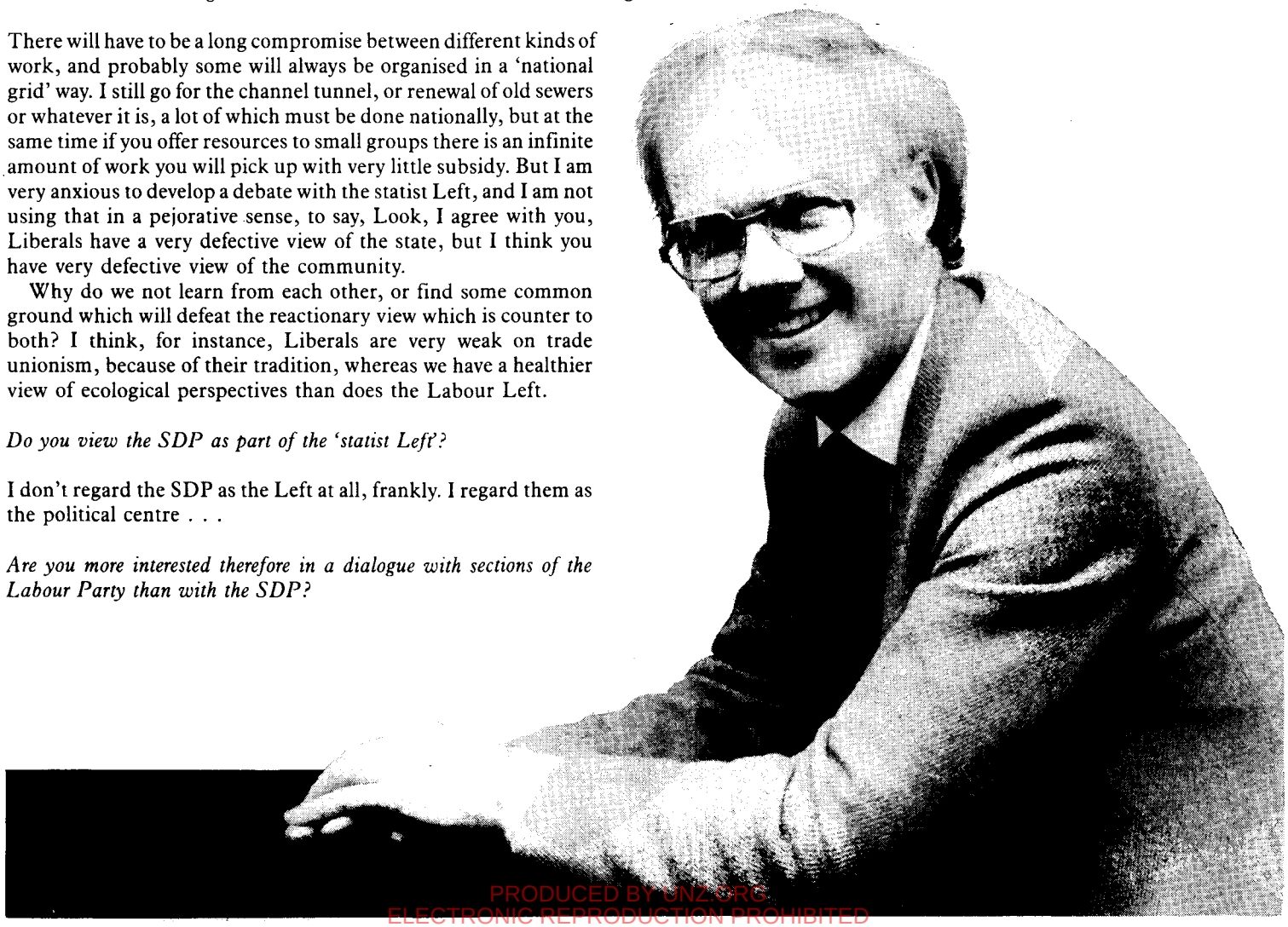
I don't regard the SDP as the Left at all, frankly. I regard them as the political centre . . .

Are you more interested therefore in a dialogue with sections of the Labour Party than with the SDP?

Yes. I don't have to promote the dialogue with the SDP in the sense that we have to have that day by day. We have a kind of papal politics in this country, where the infallibility of our own party must not be impugned. Because of the way we go to the electorate, with our first-past-the-post system, the party ticket is the crucial thing and we have to say, 'We are the people who alone can govern'. That is detrimental to the whole range of political opinion. The debate I want to see is between the people who regard themselves as radical and progressive, to see whether they do stick in ghettoes or whether they are prepared to come and debate issues. There are people around who will debate: Ken Livingstone is a good case in point.

You published a pamphlet ten years ago on Liberals and a Popular Front. I don't know whether this is a form of words that you would stick with now. But at the same time as the co-operation with forces such as the Labour Party which that implies, you are plainly also trying to replace the Labour Party.

If the development of political ideas and values amongst the population is the most crucial thing we have to achieve, to get out of the social crisis we are in (and Liberals believe that it is more a social than an economic crisis), then we have got some time in which to do it before we have to come to that confrontation. Now we have to look at whether breaking the electoral system is ever possible; that would develop the debate more than anything else. Because unless you believe that your particular group can get 51% of the vote, you haven't got a chance of an overall majority. You've got to look at where the coalitions of interest lie.



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Why do you think the Liberals have been doing fairly well in local elections recently and the SDP seems to be doing poorly?

There is one facile reason which is that we have been going longer. There is also this curious factor which weighs against us nationally but benefits us locally. Our commitment to the power of the neighbourhood and its development can build support which can greatly add to the core support. If your core support is 25%, we know that by winning over people consistently in an area you can add on 10 or 20%. The SDP don't have that view of politics, they are much more in the old Labour mould of believing that you develop the manifesto and if you get enough people to vote for it you can enact it. They don't see that the processes in politics almost determine the ends. And we say that the processes by which you reach political awareness actually affect what you can do. I was very impressed after the election by Bob Rowthorn's piece in *Marxism Today* where he argues precisely that point, that one of the great reasons for Labour's debacle was that they had totally misunderstood the processes of politics and the consequence was that they had become very blinkered, treating the manifesto as the be-all and end-all.

Earlier we discussed the state, now what about class? Don't you leave yourself a very limited field of action, for example faced with the extent of industrial collapse in Liverpool, if you resolutely refuse to take sides on the issue of class? Haven't you cut yourself off from the means of making the sorts of changes needed?

We are weak on class because we have not had to confront it in those terms. There is a gap in Liberal thinking which ought to be addressed more rigorously than hitherto. Having said that, I think there is much that can be done even within the present framework which would translate the present powerlessness into much greater feelings of belonging, of hope and worthwhileness without necessarily tackling the commanding heights. Before I came into the House, I worked for five years as general secretary of Bradford Metropolitan Council for Voluntary Service. I was amazed at the resilience and the resourcefulness of people working in all sorts of appalling circumstances. Where they got grant aid for a project, it made a huge difference to their perception of their power. The

Liberals have a very defective view of the state, but I think you have a very defective view of the community

Manpower Services Commission, which at present is an inflexible, blinkered organisation, could be transformed into a far more flexible body. It could say, look, if it costs round about £5000 a year to keep an adult unemployed, we will offer £5000 a year for every new job created — with the agreement of the local trades council so that there's no job substitution, and with the agreement of the Chamber of Commerce so there's no unfair competition. I believe that there would be an immense take-up tomorrow by every tenants' association, community group, or church, and there would be a mushrooming of worthwhile workshops, manufacturing, artistic, cultural and social services. Now that is one way where the national state actually doesn't have to do more than make available resources which are currently there.

I'm as yet unconvinced that class is such a determinant. It's the same when I read about feminism and socialism; I am unconvinced that the socialism which is talked about by socialist feminists is what I recognise. They are talking about anti-capitalism to my mind, because the socialism I see around me is a very structured one, a very patriarchal one.

Are you anti-capitalist yourself?

Yes. I dislike capitalism, obviously, but again, I am forced to accept that we are going to have a mix. The incentive of a desire to earn and a desire to make money is, alas, always going to be part of our personality, therefore let us assist people to do that in the least exploitative way possible. The alternative is such a centrally-directed bureaucracy as to be absolutely ferocious in its detail and its impingement on people's lives.

Has feminism had much impact on the Liberal Party?

Not enough, in the sense that it should be challenging everybody at all levels. There is a working group of women that has been set up through the party's standing committee which is endeavouring to develop its own analysis, its own influence. Where there are women saying I am going to stand up and be counted, they attract a whole new set of women to work and to organise in a way they would not for me as a candidate, for instance. I find that quite challenging. In some ways the most optimistic new awakening that is around in politics is the women's movement. It says that all that's gone before is so partial and so lacking in dimension of perception and feeling as to be the cause of its own downfall.

The most dynamic part of the women's movement at present is involved with the peace movement. On this issue there is one of the sharpest differences between the Liberals and the SDP, on which you got off very lightly in the general election. What is your view on nuclear missiles, and on the development of policy between the SDP and the Liberals?

I've been a member of CND since the Vietnam Peace Campaign in 1968-69. I am not wholly in sympathy with CND in the sense that it is in terrible danger of taking a nationalistic view of disarmament It's almost like Pontius Pilate, saying we will wash our hands of these appalling weapons, but we are not going to worry unduly whether somebody else comes and takes over from us. I am much more in sympathy with END. The debate is moving away from whether Britain should abandon nuclear weapons, and towards whether Britain should think more about Europeanism than Atlanticism. This is very optimistic and Reagan is obviously a tremendous spur to it. People are beginning to ask, 'Do we really feel any safer in alliance with the United States?'

If you reject deterrence what is the alternative? If we are going to move towards Europeanism, we have to replace deterrence by the ratchel wheel principle of defensive strategy to demonstrate to the Warsaw Pact the impossibility of invasion and occupation. That is not done by nuclear weapons. That is my position, which has growing support among Liberals at all levels. In the parliamentary debate on Cruise not only were all Liberals present and voting against Cruise, but all SDP members were present and voting against Cruise.

It's not SDP policy, though.

No, but my job as one of the Liberal whips was to do what I could and we got everybody into the lobby against Cruise, for whatever reason.

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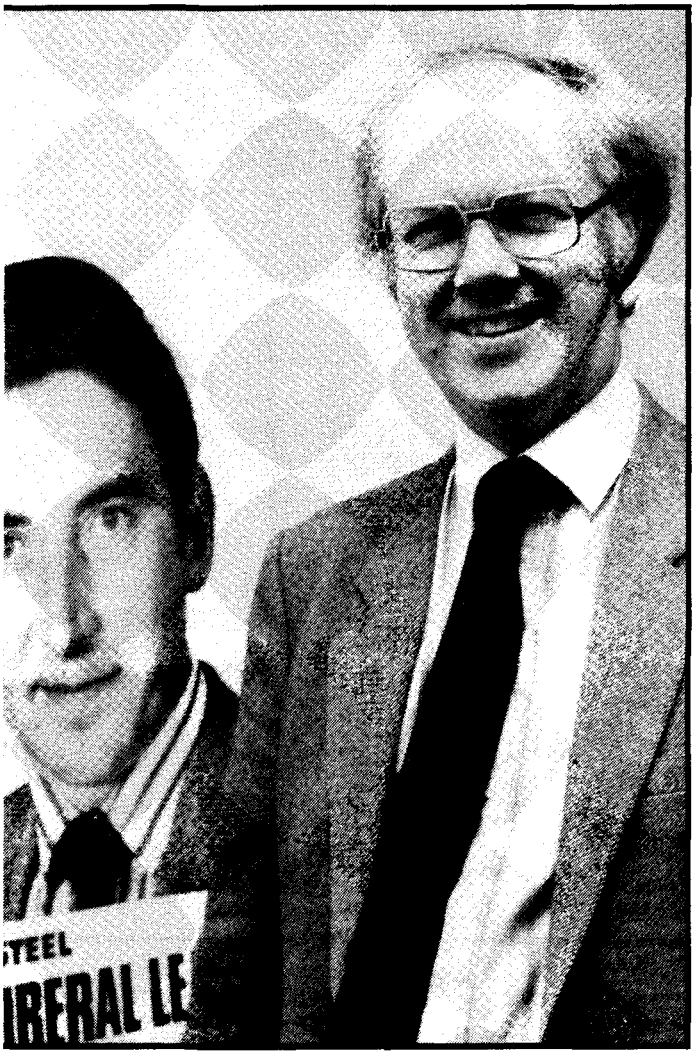

Are the SDP and the Liberal Party going to be able to come closer together on nuclear weapons policy?

I don't see it as being at all beyond the bounds of likelihood that there will be a position on defence by 1987 that I can subscribe to and which the bulk of the SDP can subscribe to.

Doesn't your approach, not just on defence but on politics more generally, command only a fairly small minority, certainly in the parliamentary party, but possibly at other levels as well, within the Liberal Party?

Come, come, you haven't noticed there was an election on the June 9. It now commands substantial support in the parliamentary party.

Well, let me mention one example. There was a letter signed by dozens of prominent Liberals in Liberal News *recently on the question of Jo Richardson's Sex Equality Bill. It castigated the bulk of the Liberal members, not you I hasten to add, for not being present and not taking part.*

Yes, I think it was reprehensible that there was not a better turnout. The only excuse I would make is the very basic one that there are 17 of us having to represent a voting support which in proportional terms would elect something like eight times that number. We had pulled people back as far as we could on Bob Wareing's Bill to stop discrimination against disabled people, two Fridays before, and therefore it was even more difficult than on a normal Friday. That is just a logistic problem, and to try to infer from that, that it is a majority that has this particular view is a very dangerous shift.

The views I am talking about with you today are not some minor tendency, they are the dominant force in the Liberal Party, as shown by the Liberal programme, by the assembly motions, by Party Council meetings. There is an ideological vacuum on the radical side of politics which only this kind of philosophy fills. The other part of the Liberal party is the Gladstonian moralist tradition, a quite legitimate and very important strand of

> In some ways the most optimistic new awakening that is around in politics is the women's movement

Liberalism. But because the world has moved on so much, particularly since the end of economic growth, it is very difficult for them to find a new philosophy which fits into the economic and social situation we face. Now because there is that vacuum, the more libertarian and radical wing of the party has gained majority support. And the parliamentary party is very different in its makeup from before the election.

What is your main indictment of the Thatcher government in the last five years?

Without doubt its divisive nature and the way it has set people against each other in the most bitter and dangerous way for the stability of our community. I am fearful that we may not even survive this government without there being much more open instability. I think July 1981 could turn out to be the trailer for the big picture. It's the setting of the unemployed against the employed, the houseowner against the tenant and so on, that kind of divisiveness which creates a society in which people either think that the government is wonderful or absolutely appalling. That is quite frightening.

If the Thatcher government is going to be defeated, there has obviously got to be a lot of co-operation amongst the various forces that are opposed to it. Whether that shows itself in the end in some sort of electoral agreement is another matter. But at this stage it seems to be a matter of discussing policies and working practically on particular issues. Perhaps we could relate that to the health service which is your own field of responsibility in parliament. Would you say there was the basis for co-operation between various political forces on the health service?

What I want on health is a campaign both to preserve the health service and to enable us to look at some of the much more crucial arguments about health, about the problem of rising expectations and declining resources. But at the moment we must hammer home the lesson about what is happening in the health service, and that must not be hijacked by any one party. If it is done as purely a Labour thing, or purely a Liberal thing for that matter, then the Thatcher steamroller will succeed because it will be presented as being a purely party political battle, which they will always win with their majority in the House. We ought to have a united health campaign. I went to speak, for instance, in Tottenham the other

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day in the Prince of Wales Hospital which is being closed. It was a joint campaign with the unions and health pressure groups. I spoke there, as did Michael Meacher; it was excellent and that sort of thing is still very rare.

There will always be an England — and a Tory party; the crucial question is, will there be sufficient mobilisation of people who are not Conservative to overcome it?

There is a problem, though. The recent health campaign of the Liberal Party was organised in large measure by the Association of Liberal Councillors. Their organising secretary Tony Greaves, quite consistently argues that what the Liberal Party has to do in the medium term is to 'destroy the Labour Party.' It obviously creates considerable difficulties in people working together if that's their perspective of each other.

I don't know that Tony talks about 'destroy', replace may be more accurate. I don't think you'll ever destroy the Labour Party in that sense, and I think it is not helpful to talk in those terms if Tony does. The crucial question is, is the object of the campaign worthwhile, if it is, no matter who else is going to be there on that demonstration with you — you're there. Tony's the same. I don't think that the two things are at all incompatible, saying, here is a campaign that if we are going to succeed has got to be run on the widest possible basis, but on the other hand we have got to achieve our organisation's strategic and ideological aim to successfully displace the Labour Party. There will always be an England and a Tory Party; the crucial question is, will there be sufficient mobilisation of people who are not Conservative by their style or background to actually overcome it? That's the issue. That's why if Labour is in this appalling difficulty it is in now because of its adherence to a very myopic view of its constituency or because it has not transformed its ideology onto a decentralised basis — the alternative economic strategy is still very centralist — then there is a tremendous vacuum because I don't think there is going to be growth, and I think socialism in that form depends on growth.

In the New Statesman *we specifically called for a non-Labour Party health service campaign. However, it's OK in a magazine to say that such a thing ought to exist, but it needs specific people to take the initiatives. Are there any initiatives that you would take to set up an organisation that involved everybody, or to try to ensure that platforms are shared . . .*

I wrote to Michael Meacher, putting that specific point some time ago, and he keeps promising a reply.

Did you go further than this?

He first of all wanted to discuss it with the shadow cabinet, and his own advisers, fair enough. I didn't want to use the fact of having contacted Michael as a party ploy. I think it is particularly in sharing platforms, at local level and national level, that we have to demonstrate that this is far too precious to try and hijack for our own party aims. Otherwise, it's very difficult to get Tories involved, and there are Conservatives who are very anxious about the health service. □

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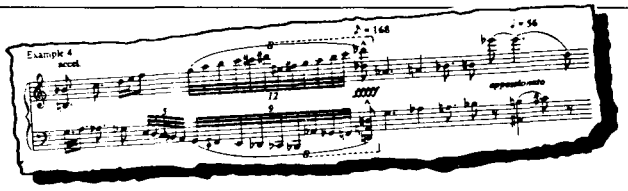

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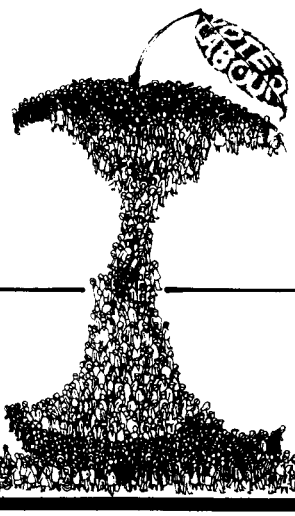
with

Eric Hobsbawm, Robin Cook
Harriet Harman & Beatrix Campbell



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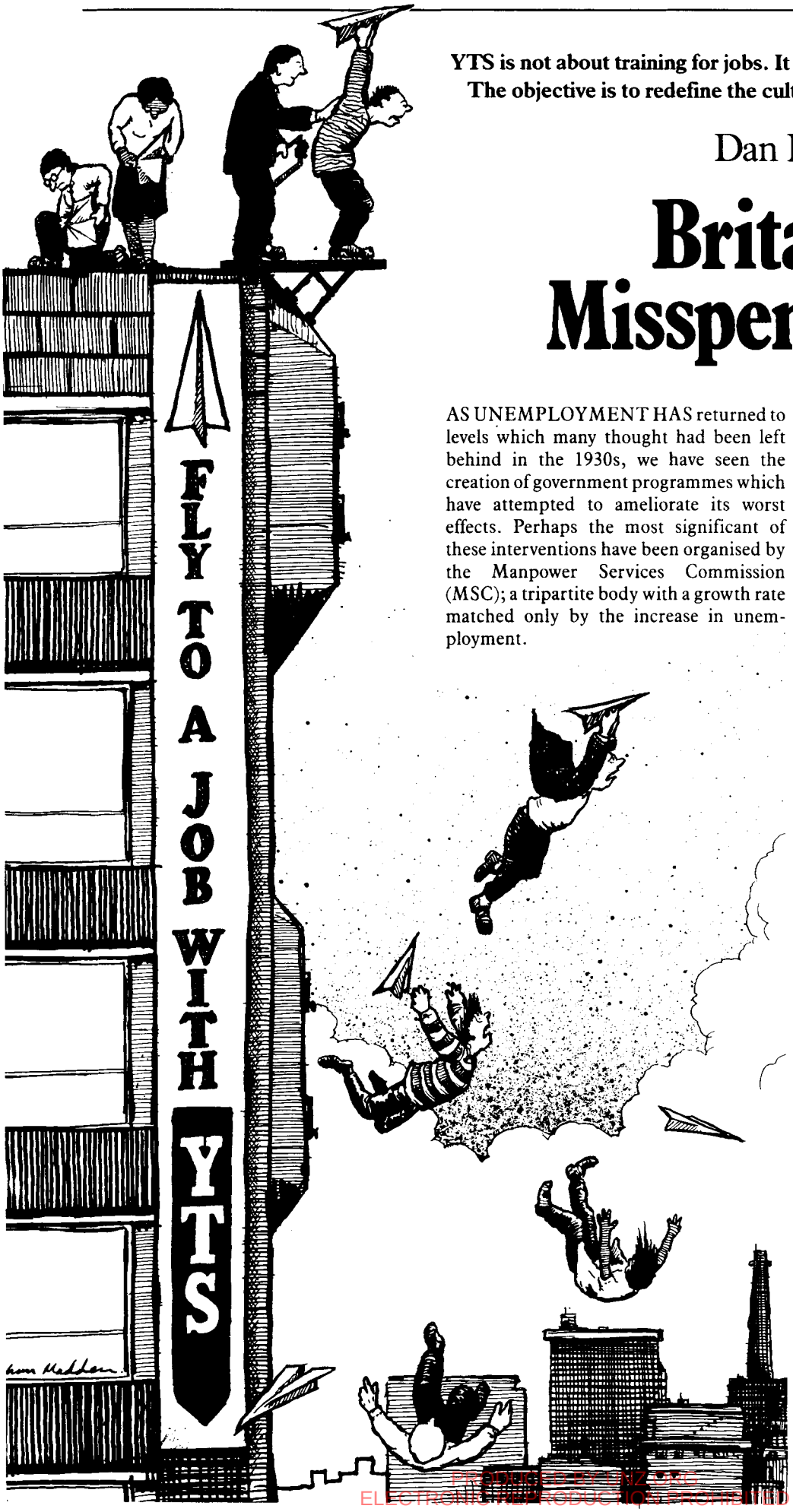

YTS is not about training for jobs. It is about something quite different. The objective is to redefine the cultural outlook of new generations.

Dan Finn

Britain's Misspent Youth

AS UNEMPLOYMENT HAS returned to levels which many thought had been left behind in the 1930s, we have seen the creation of government programmes which have attempted to ameliorate its worst effects. Perhaps the most significant of these interventions have been organised by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC); a tripartite body with a growth rate matched only by the increase in unemployment.

In place of a strategy of job creation, and apart from attempts to manipulate the unemployment statistics, MSC programmes represent the most *active* policies of the state for responding to the crisis of mass unemployment. Since 1974 its activities have affected millions of people, kept thousands away from the dole queues, and structured the experiences of the vast majority of school leavers making the hazardous transition to work.

In recent years these programmes, especially those for young people, have gone through various transformations to retain political support *and* accommodate the unemployed. From an initial response aimed at the most 'disadvantaged' (the Job Creation Programme), which defined unemployment as a cyclical and temporary problem, we have arrived at the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) which in many areas of the country became the only source of work for school leavers.

Last September, however, YOP was replaced by the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which will provide 460,000 places for about £1 billion. This guarantees a year's training, including 13 weeks off-the-job, to all minimum age school leavers. 300,000 trainees will be placed directly with employers and a further 160,000 in a different, more expensive variety of local authority, voluntary and state schemes. The YTS is intended to be the mechanism through which future generations of the working class make their first acquaintance with wage labour.

Over the period of its existence, MSC finance has also been used to change the activities of many institutions. The work of colleges, of voluntary organisations, and now of schools, is being transformed. The job security and employment conditions of thousands of workers has been undermined, especially in further education; and the MSC currently dominates our perceptions of unemployment.

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Remarkably the MSC has been able to cultivate extensive support for each phase of expansion. Despite reservations, a tripartite consensus between government, unions and employers has been carefully constructed around each new programme.

From YOP to the YTS

YOP was originally promoted as an avenue into full time work, but this 'promise' soured as young trainees found it more difficult to obtain work. In its first year one in eight school leavers were affected by YOP; by 1982 it was covering one in two; and in 1983 there were more school leavers on YOP courses than in normal jobs. In five years YOP provided temporary placements for nearly 1.9 million youngsters.

The most contentious element of YOP concerned the large number of trainees placed with private employers, usually for six months. In 1981, Youthaid pointed out that they were 'concentrated in small, low-paying, non-unionised workplaces'. Rather than philanthropic employers 'helping' the young unemployed, it became evident that many were using YOP to subsidise their recruitment procedures, if not directly exploiting young trainees as cheap labour.

As the programme expanded it became impossible to monitor and 'police' the scheme; vetting was perfunctory, and fewer on-site inspections were carried out. A growing proportion of youngsters were returned to the dole at the end of their placements. Evidence accumulated that employers were substituting trainees for workers; the MSC admitted to a job substitution rate of at least 30%. The Government refused to increase the trainee allowance and its purchasing power was steadily eroded. Few trainees received off-the-job education or training; they were excluded from many aspects of employment legislation. Between 1980 and 1983 there were seventeen deaths and over 9,000 injuries to trainees. There were many complaints about the arbitrary discipline procedures being imposed by employers.[1]

In place of a scheme intended to improve the employment prospects of the young, and get them into work, a pool of vulnerable cheap labour was created. At best YOP was redistributing unemployment, it was doing nothing to reduce it. By 1981, there was a groundswell of opposition and the first indications that young people were refusing to take up places. Unions became disenchanted: Tower Hamlets Trades Council argued that 'every major promise that was given by the MSC to the trade union movement has been broken, ignored or manipulated'. Motions were submitted to the annual TUC Congress calling for a withdrawal of union cooperation. Congress accepted many of the arguments, but the particular resolutions were eclipsed in a new debate initiated by the MSC, which appeared to secure both the long-standing TUC policy of day-release education for young workers and a new right of access to 'quality' training for unemployed school leavers. The abuses of YOP were admitted, but the focus of attention shifted; after a consultative process, the MSC, voluntary organisations, employers and many trade union officials launched a concerted campaign to win support for a new training programme — the YTS.

The TUC and the MSC

To explain how the TUC and many individual unions, endorsed these new proposals, we should understand how they had initially become enmeshed with the MSC. Since the last war, the trade union movement has called for government intervention to impose coherence on the chaotic training arrangements that characterise many sectors of employment. At the same time, the TUC has become involved in a range of corporate organisations which have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to modernise the British economy.

The high point of this process was the period of the 'social contract', initiated by the 1974/79 Labour government. In return for wage restraint and a curb on militancy, the TUC and its affiliates were offered legislative concessions and a more direct involvement in the management of the economy. It was in this context that, in 1974, the MSC came into existence.

The MSC's constitution guaranteed union representation and in contrast to earlier arrangements was empowered to pursue more vigorous policies for the reform of industrial training. The trade union movement saw within this a major advance, which seemed to be confirmed when the Labour government expanded the direct training services of the MSC, became more heavily involved in supporting the recession-hit apprenticeship system and developed special programmes for the unemployed.

The first Thatcher government was, however, determined to reverse state involvement in these areas, and the budget of the MSC was slashed. The Tories proposed to return training to market forces. In opposing these policy changes, the TUC became more committed, arguing for the MSC's expansion in response to accelerating unemployment.

In the wake of the inner-city riots of 1981, which were partly blamed on unemployment, the Tories were converted; they did a 'U-turn', and expanded provision for the young. Paradoxically, this took place at the same time that individual trade unions were being ousted from other MSC bodies. In particular, 17 Industrial Training Boards, which had imposed some coherence on patterns of training, were abolished. In these shifts, the role of trade unions was redefined as their influence and power were eroded.

The power of the MSC

The MSC was also concerned to create new forms of local involvement in dealing with the unemployed. It established a structure of area boards to approve schemes, made up of nominees from the TUC, employers and the voluntary sector. These boards enabled the MSC to present itself as open and democratic, when it actually bypassed established democratic and collective bargaining procedures. Local authorities, for example, had little formal involvement, and could only compete for MSC resources on the same grounds as other sponsors. Many trade union officials and lay members approved schemes without reference to criteria (around rates of pay, job security,

Composition of YOP: 1979-83

	1978/79	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83
Work Experience (WEEP)	128,200	182,100	304,500	461,500	393,400
(% with Private Employers)	(84.5%)	(76.2%)	(79.5%)	(80.4%)	(78.6%)
Work Preparation	34,000	34,300	55,500	91,500	67,800
Pilot YTS Places (12 months long)					81,900
TOTAL — ALL YOP	162,200	216,400	360,000	553,000	543,000

[1] For detailed evidence on these points see the report from Sheffield Trades Council, *A Trade Union Response to YOPs and NTI* (1982), or the report produced by D Carter and I Stewart (TGWU officers in Manchester), *YOP, Youth Training and the MSC: the need for a new Trade Union Response* (1982).

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discipline, and so on) which they would normally apply in collective bargaining.

Though area boards had formal authority over the scheme, the reality was more complex. In effect, they obscure the way in which operational power remains firmly entrenched in the hands of the civil service, which controls the collection and presentation of data, the monitoring of schemes, the allocation of resources and the construction of policy. As the MSC developed, it became a tightly structured bureaucracy with massive administrative power.

Colin Ball, one of the civil servants involved in the creation of YOP, has described another way in which the MSC exercises this control. He points to a key element in MSC practice, the protection of their central authority by the division of operational responsibilitiy amongst a host of sponsors.[2] Ideologically, because this involves community groups, employers, local authorities, colleges and voluntary organisations, the MSC is able to present itself as involving the whole of the community. In reality, he witnessed a process of divide and rule, where few sponsors could challenge the entrenched power of the bureaucracy.

The MSC has not, therefore, been a simple palliative. It represents a bureaucratic response to the political problems posed by unemployment. It focuses attention, not on the crisis of production and investment, but on the qualities and capacities of the workforce. It takes for granted the demands of employers and seeks to adjust the supply of labour accordingly. The MSC is not engaged in combatting class, sexual and racial privilege: its activities have simply reproduced and reinforced these basic distinctions. Only by grasping these broader points can we appreciate why the MSC has been given such massive resources.

Although initially hostile to special programmes for the unemployed, the Thatcher government soon came to appreciate their strategic importance. In their battles over rates and public expenditure, the MSC offered a route for bypassing the political control of local authorities, who might have put those resources to other uses, such as extending educational opportunities. The MSC was also successful in implementing low-wage, Conservative proposals which under other circumstances would have been vigorously opposed. More importantly, perhaps, the MSC has transformed the experiences of most school leavers and has profoundly affected the ways in which we can think about youth unemployment.

Training without jobs

From its inception the MSC evolved the mythology that youth unemployment was caused by a 'mismatch' between young workers' capacities and the characteristics required by employers. It firmly located the problem within the unemployed themselves. The almost total focus on job-finding and job-keeping reinforced the myth that there were jobs available to anyone who had the 'social skills' and persistence to find and secure them.

> between 1980 and 1983 there were seventeen deaths and over 9,000 injuries to trainees

Though they formally acknowledged the importance of economic factors, it was the ideology of mismatch which informed the development of their programmes, both obscuring the structural causes of youth unemployment and easing the achievement of other objectives. Smothered in a rhetoric of concern, it enabled young people to be taken off the streets into workplaces and colleges, into a 'safe' environment, demonstrating that the state was tackling unemployment.

In terms of the experiences and expectations of young people, it developed new kinds of work induction which were not merely concerned with giving them particular skills. As part of its deeper objectives, the MSC was attempting to structure and define their response to the experience of cheap labour and unemployment. The expectations of school leavers were manipulated and systematically reduced, as they were given their first lessons in the realities of Thatcherite Britain.

The period between 1978 and 1983 was marked by a working out of new definitions of the rights and opportunities of those young people who, despite mass unemployment, leave school at the earliest moment. The young working class, it was alleged, needed a year of 'training' before they could even enter the labour market: young school leavers were effectively separated from the political question of full employment.

The Youth Training Scheme

The YTS had been endorsed by the trade union movement largely because of the claimed removal of the abuses of YOP and the offer of 'quality' training to unemployed school leavers. However, in view of the history of YOP, and more recent developments, such claims should be regarded with considerable scepticism.

Throughout 1983 the YTS was publicised as an employer-led scheme. This did not merely reflect the need to secure places, but indicated an important change in emphasis, signalling a series of concessions to employers: together they question whether it is possible for the YTS to meet the interests of trainees.

Employers have retained complete control over hiring and firing, and have been granted special discounts on the charges for off-the-job educational provision (resulting in larger classes, and so on). Trainees are excluded from Employment Protection, from most of the Race and Sex Discrimination Acts, and Health and Safety provision is inadequate.

Schemes negotiated nationally by the Large Companies Unit (a divison of the MSC), which account for a third of the places offered by employers, are not subject to the approval of local boards. In Coventry, the result has been that hairdressing employers, who had been excluded from YOP for abuse of the programme, can now take on trainees through a national agreement. In general, sponsors need only declare that there is no appropriate or recognised trade union for approval, and the scheme can proceed.

More disturbingly, many of the local employer-based places are organised by private training agencies. These are profit-making organisations, which the MSC will largely entrust to monitor themselves. In Birmingham, where over half the places are controlled by agencies, the local NATFHE branch has already established that many of them have questionable credentials. There is evidence of direct abuse: an outer London agency was charging employers £10 a week for the trainees it placed with them.

The Thatcher government maintains that *the young have priced themselves out of* jobs. Tory policy, in the shape of the YTS, involves reconstructing youth as cheap labour. Despite an earlier commitment, they have refused to increase the £25 a week allowance in line with inflation. The £25 should be compared with average earnings of £47 which 16 year old employees received in 1981.

With respect to quality. it should be stressed that the on-the-job training will not be assessed and it is important to question the MSC's capacity to enforce standards in a scheme which has no effective monitoring or skill testing. Unlike our European competitors, the YTS will simply provide trainees with a certificate which without testing of standards must be of questionable value.

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The broader, educational pretensions of the MSC were punctured when they issued guidelines for the content of the off-the-job provision which specifically excluded considering matters 'related to the organisation and functioning of society in general'. Young people, it seemed, could learn how to fill in application forms, but could not discuss why they were unemployed! Although those guidelines were withdrawn, the Employment Minister in question — Peter Morrison — further revealed his conception of the scheme in a Commons debate in July 1983:

> 'The scheme is not a social service. Its purpose is to teach youngsters what the real world of work is all about. That means arriving on time, giving of their best during the working day, and perhaps staying on a little longer to complete an unfinished task'.

In view of these developments, it is reasonable to suggest that this 'new deal' has more to do with providing employers with a pool of cheap and vulnerable labour, from which they can pick and choose their recruits, than it has to do with meeting the training and educational needs of the young unemployed.

A permanent bridge to work?

As school leavers have few, if any options, they will undoubtedly enrol in their thousands on the YTS. However, we should be wary of accepting such behaviour and the numerous other public successes that the MSC will parade over the next year, at face value. There is evidence that many young people are unwilling to become involved (only 55% of expected trainees had enrolled by the beginning of November), and Job Centres have resorted to sending threatening letters to reluctant trainees. In less than six months, a voluntary 'quality' scheme was looking like a compulsory dose of work experience.

This lack of enthusiasm should not surprise us. Despite the blandishments of MSC publicity, it should be obvious that there will be enormous variations within the YTS. Some employers will offer good training, with a chance of a job at the end; but many sponsors clearly offer what most school leavers see as an extension of YOP. Many young people will not enrol until convinced they will not obtain work; and, where parental resources will allow it, others have chosen to extend their education.

The persistence of youth unemployment will clearly undermine the YTS. All school leavers may be offered places but, inevitably, many will be displaced at the end of their training. From the summer of 1984, there will be thousands of YTS graduates entering a depressed labour market where their job prospects will be diminished by competition from experienced adults and a new batch of subsidised school leavers.

After those aged over 50, under 24 year olds are more vulnerable to prolonged unemployment than any other group. In October, Youthaid estimated that half of the country's under-19s and one in four of the under-25s were out of work. Many of this generation are being consigned to the margins of the economy, to alternate between insecure badly paid jobs and long spells of unemployment. These realities will have serious implications for the credibility of the scheme and for the reactions of young people to it. The YTS is more likely to be seen as a 'gangplank to the dole' than a 'bridge to work'.

In response to this dilemma the state has introduced a number of other cheap labour schemes, ranging from the Young Workers Subsidy (100,000 places) which encourages

Y.O.P.S. scheme, BR station, the Wirral. Pay £23.50 per week, 1981

employers to undercut rates of pay established by collective bargaining; to the Community Programme for the long-term unemployed (130,000 places), which on any project can only pay an average wage of £60 or less. In addition, the MSC has recently launched a debate on what it calls its Adult Training Strategy.

Whatever the outcome of that consultative process, the political message is clear. The programmes of the MSC will be in the forefront of policy changes, as the state intervenes in the processes whereby unemployment as a problem is defined. Orchestrated by the Thatcher government, the MSC will be attempting to restore the credibility of the YTS, as well as compel the participation of reluctant trainees. It will take new initiatives to create a consensus about how we respond to those trainees who fail to get work and to the growing numbers of the long-term unemployed. These policies, which could result in up to a million people on MSC schemes, carry all kinds of implications for the trade union movement.

Trade union responses

There has been opposition to the MSC. Some trade unions, and many workplaces, have negotiated improvements or alternatively will have nothing to do with it; and thousands of the unemployed have refused places on its various schemes. This resistance, however, has been fragmented and localised. This has partly been the result of the TUC's unwillingness to question its commitment to the MSC, but more realistically has reflected the success of Thatcherism in exploiting the plight of the unemployed.

On a number of occasions the TUC has blocked proposals which were blatantly provocative — that the YTS should be compulsory and pay £15 a week; that adults should do 'voluntary' work for their unemployment benefit. But on each occasion, within the bowels of the MSC, a compromise was established which gave concessions, but at the same time delivered programmes which offered little of real value to the unemployed.

The MSC has formally kept its commitments about paying the rate for the job, no job substitution, and so on; but these guarantees have in fact been eroded, redefined and manipulated, so that in a number of areas the MSC and employers have been able to proceed as they see fit.

Unfortunately, the debate about trade union involvement has been polarised between those advocating a boycott of MSC programmes and those who claim that existing guarantees are sufficient. In place of the pragmatism which has guided official attitudes, many trade unionists argue that participation in the MSC has been largely ineffectual, has given a trade union seal of approval to cheap labour schemes, and has made it difficult to create a strategy of opposition.

The call for a boycott though has created

[2] C Ball, Here Comes Super YOP, *New Society*, 20 August 1981.

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a gulf between those working within and those working outside the MSC, and amongst many active trade unionists. The argument creates divisions because it fails to recognise that MSC programmes, however inadequately, do respond to the needs of many of the unemployed. A boycott could easily be understood as an attempt to defend what already exists — a racist and sexist apprenticeship system and an elitist structure of education. It would offer little to the workers and activists involved in MSC schemes, or to young people who have no other options.

TUC policy calls on trade unionists to report abuses to area boards; to negotiate improvements; to recruit trainees and to monitor the impact of the YTS. These are important activities which, without more resources and a broader campaign, are unlikely to be translated into reality, even in organised workplaces. More fundamentally, these proposals are barely adequate for creating an active relationship between young people and the trade union movement.

If the TUC continues to participate in the MSC, its role must be transformed from one of consensual partner to that of an advocate of the interests of trainees. On one level, that means establishing the right of trainees to organise and be represented at all levels within the MSC, as well as *exposing* abuses and *campaigning* for real

a gangplank to the dole rather than a bridge to work

improvements in their conditions. At an ideological level, it means drawing attention to the duplicity of the Thatcher government which is pursuing an economic policy which destroys jobs — and a training policy which presupposes their existence. □

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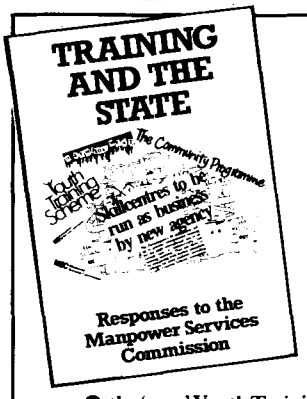

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The Yugoslavs are encountering difficulties along their independent road to socialism. Will they find a way through?

Martin Myant

YUGOSLAVIA: an Experiment in Crisis

SINCE TITO DIED in May 1980 there have been clear signs of serious crisis inside Yugoslavia. National tensions have resurfaced, most dramatically in the predominantly Albanian area of Kosovo where martial law was declared for a time in the spring of 1981. Economic problems have multiplied, setting into reverse years of growth. Harsh austerity measures are eating into people's living standards causing growing public disillusionment. The ruling League of Communists is itself increasingly paralysed by internal divisions and a loss of confidence in the leadership.

Tito, it is claimed, led Yugoslavia towards the creation of a new 'model' of socialism which was based on non-alignment, respect for internal national differences and the development of self-management. There is no question that a great deal was achieved. The Yugoslav state held together despite its national diversity. It won respect around the world as an independent diplomatic force and its claim to be countering the bureaucratisation of society has attracted a great deal of interest.

Nevertheless, there were always underlying tensions and disappointments. Interviews with partisans who had fought the Nazis in the war and took the first steps in building the new Yugoslavia showed that even in 1971 they were dissatisfied with what was being achieved.[1] They had believed they were fighting for a society based on social equality, full national equality, the right to work and full democracy at all levels. Instead, they have a society with very clear social divisions, continuing national conflicts, about one million unemployed and a political system that leaves the majority of the population feeling alienated and manipulated.

The great success that they could be proud of was economic construction. After the war Yugoslavia was backward and devastated. By the 1970s it was an industrialised country. Its national income per head is estimated to have risen from 64% of the world average in 1950 to 131% in 1975. The crucial point now is that, with the halting of economic growth, one of the regime's major claims to legitimacy is threatened.

This must mean heightened tension, but the dangers should not be exaggerated. As we shall see, the three elements of the Yugoslav model — non-alignment, national policies and self-management — can all provide important sources of stability.

With the halting of economic growth, one of the regime's major claims to legitimacy is threatened.

Reconciliation: Kruschev and Tito in Yugoslavia

Nonalignment

The first, and most fundamental element, is Yugoslavia's international orientation. In May 1948 the 'Cominform' condemned the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. This was a shattering surprise to the world as Yugoslavia had previously been seen as the Soviet Union's closest and most reliable ally. So strong was Communist influence in the resistance that Tito's partisans had established effectively a one-party state when they took power from the defeated Nazi forces. In fact, so loyal were the Yugoslav Communists to the Soviet model that they were even beginning the collectivisation of agriculture.

The crucial issue was probably Stalin's determination to consolidate a bloc under firm Soviet hegemony. Tito — enjoying enormous prestige because of Yugoslavia's heroic struggle during the war — could actually have been an obstacle to this and was even thinking in terms of a federation with Bulgaria which could have created a fairly powerful socialist state. In response to criticism, however, Yugoslavia did not repent. Instead it defied Soviet attempts to starve its economy and developed an independent stand that had not really existed at the time of the initial break.

Aid from the USA was essential to both military and economic survival in the face of Soviet hostility in the 1950s, but there is no evidence at all that it had any further influence on Yugoslavia's foreign policy. It was always understood as cynical self interest. There was never any likelihood of Yugoslavia joining NATO. In fact, a major reconciliation was achieved with the USSR when Khrushchev visited Belgrade in 1955 and publicly accepted what had become the crucial Yugoslav demand — that different countries had the right to find their own roads to socialism. That was an important change in the international communist movement and Yugoslavia has continued to occupy a prominent position as a firm defender of every party's right to determine its own policies.

Yugoslavia's greatest international achievement is the founding and development of the nonaligned movement which was intended to give a powerful voice to the emerging 'third world' countries. It has recently been split by a number of conflicts

[1] Published in the Belgrade weekly *NIN* 28 November 1971.

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and Yugoslavia has come into sharp disagreement with Cuba over the issue of whether the movement could regard the USSR as its 'natural ally'. In the Yugoslav view, it could not. This partly reflected disagreement with Soviet policy in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, and partly a belief that the movement's size and credibility depended on its maintaining firm independence from both power blocs. In no sense did it indicate a desire to ally with USA, but it did place Yugoslavia, on this one issue, in the same camp as the more reactionary 'non-aligned' countries. There is no likelihood of an abandonment of the policy of nonalignment. It has given Yugoslavia immense standing in the world. Rather than being a minor member of a bloc it can present itself as a forcefully independent state with a prominent role in a world movement. Moreover, Tito's whole approach to foreign policy has greatly strengthened the regime's domestic standing. There is no danger that, as in Poland, it could be condemned by a significant section of the population simply as a foreign imposition. Moreover, it is an orientation that brings economic benefits. The US is deeply concerned at the prospect of Warsaw Pact bases on the Adriatic. Despite Yugoslavia's clear opposition to US policy around the world, the *Wall Street Journal* of 6 July 1982 reported that bankers had given new loans to Yugoslavia following State Department reminders that it 'was a friendly nation outside the Warsaw Pact'.

Nationalism

The second element of 'Titoism' is the recognition of Yugoslavia's national heterogeneity. It in fact contains six nations and a number of national minorities. The Serbs, making up 40% of the population, had almost total dominance in pre-war Yugoslavia and this was a major factor facilitating its downfall. The Nazis could even rely on the fascist Ustasha movement to lead an 'independent' Croatian state and to take a grisly share in massacring Jews, Serbs and anti-fascists. In developing a resistance movement it was quite impossible simply to advocate the restoration of a Yugoslav state. In fact, in some parts of the country Yugoslavia could hardly be mentioned at all. It was therefore crucial that the Yugoslav Communists emphasised that their aim was a federal republic without the pre-war ruling groups. National and social revolution were to be linked.

Even after liberation, the national question has remained very much a live issue. Part of the trouble is the enormous variations in levels of economic development. Figures for national product per head show Slovenia almost twice the Yugoslav average and, Croatia slightly above the average. But for Kosovo — the small autonomous province within Serbia inhabited largely by Albanians — the figure is less than 30% having dropped from over 50% in 1953. Unemployment is similarly a regional phenomenon affecting over 20% of the workforce in Kosovo while Slovenia

they even confiscate the works of Enver Hoxha at the border

suffers from a labour shortage. Government attempts to aid the more backward regions have typically created a few new industries with well-paid workers while leaving the area as a whole undeveloped. That can cause resentment on all sides: the backward area wants more help while the advanced areas feel they are making sacrifices which are only helping a privileged minority.

Economic difficulties create the ideal environment for national tensions to flourish. It is very easy to blame whole nations for one's troubles especially when there is a history of conflict. A major plank of Croatian nationalism today is that economic policy in Yugoslavia is consistently unfavourable to them. That view gained widespread acceptance in the freer atmosphere of the late 1960s and contributed to massive protests in Zagreb in 1971. The federal leadership responded very firmly, purging an estimated 3000 people from responsible positions, as it seemed that even many Communist officials shared the protesters' feelings.

The most serious troubles in terms of duration and extent of violence errupted in Kosovo in March 1981. Strikes and demonstrations by young people of Albanian nationality were suppressed by the police and army leaving officially nine dead. Many more were arrested and imprisoned over the following weeks. There were some reported demands for 'Union with Albania', but a more persistent and credible demand was for Kosovo to be given the status of a republic within the Yugoslav federation which would actually give it the formal right to secede. The Yugoslav authorities responded by accusing the Albanian government of stirring up trouble: they even confiscate the works of Enver Hoxha at the border.

Nationalist protest in Kosovo is very disturbing, but it does not represent an immediate threat to the federation. Albanians are widely regarded with contempt and socially ostracised so that a repressive policy can even be welcomed by some Yugoslavs. Croatia, with its strong Catholic church and history of 'clerico-fascism', is still potentially the most dangerous area of nationalist opposition, but even that should not be exaggerated. Despite its international terrorist acts, the Ustasha movement has no real domestic base. The achievements of post-war Yugoslavia have reduced it to insignificance. Nationalist feelings up to now typically relate to calls for a better deal *within* a Yugoslav state, not for its dissolution — widely seen as an invitation for a foreign invasion.

Among the constitutional changes to outmanoevre nationalist feelings was the decision in 1971 to replace the President with a collective head of state. The model was Switzerland where the post is held by a member of a different national group every year. Whether it could work so well in Yugoslavia, a country that may need an established figure-head if it is to play a world role, is another matter.

Self-management

In domestic policy the core of the Yugoslav model is said to be 'self-management'. The stated aims are very ambitious. It is to 'transcend alienation through the transformation of working men into managers'. In terms of Marxist theory it is to make possible the withering away of the state and its replacement by an 'association of free producers'. The first steps were taken only after the split with the USSR. Tito argued that Stalin's dictatorial methods in foreign policy reflected the centralisation of power *within* the Soviet Union. Self-management was presented as Yugoslavia's alternative to this bureaucratic system.

It is now understood to mean the decentralisation of power in all fields of Yugoslav society, but its core remains workers' councils which were first established in a number of big enterprises in 1949. They do not manage directly, but they have considerable formal power including the right to appoint the director who becomes *ex-officio* a member of the council. It is, however, quite clear that self-management has not dramatically altered the workers' position in society and neither has it overcome their alienation at work. This applies both to workplace representation and to local administration which seems to give even less of a voice to ordinary people.[2]

Managers, although nominally under the control of a workers' council, typically still run the enterprise as 'an autocrat, despot'.[3] For them the only use for

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elf-management is as a transmission belt to ommunicate their views to the workforce. hat is a conception fully accepted in ractice by most of the leading activists ho staff party, trade union and self-anagement bodies and they are quite repared to maintain their authority over he workers' councils by harrassing and ublicly ridiculing individual workers who ight challenge a business decision.

This is possible partly because, as urveys have repeatedly shown, manual orkers typically do not believe that they ave the right or the ability to make a ontribution to major management deci-ions. That attitude is actually reinforced y a spell on a workers' council. Up to 20% f employees participate at some level in elf-management bodies, where they can be onfronted with a discussion on issues of usiness policy on which they lack the xpertise or background information to ontribute anything positive. They are left eling incompetent and even more power-ss than before.

Nevertheless, manual workers do have ith in a very different conception of elf-management. They believe it should xpress their proclaimed power in society two ways. First, they want, but do not ave, a control over managerial power in the etailed organisation of work and over the rbitrary authoritarianism of some fore-en: in short they want self-management mean a strong shop-floor organisation.

Their second desire is for a system that an improve their material position; but is shows up the crucial limitation of a ructure based on representation within e individual workplace. Even wages epend very largely on centrally decided uidelines and on the possibility of overnment financial assistance to the nterprise. The issue of concern most equently cited is housing and there the orkers' council has very little power.

Under these circumstances it is hardly rprising that the majority of working eople are apathetic towards self-manage-ent. It is theoretically possible to raise y issue, but the practical problems for an experienced worker in forcing a point ross at one of the infrequent general eetings of up to 500 people are obviously mense. Nevertheless, it would be wrong dismiss self-management as irrelevant. It as helped to give the regime greater gitimacy. There is a lot of pride in what is en as a *Yugoslav* achievement: it is, at the ry least, 'something more than what the oviet Union has'.[4] There must, however, e practical obstacles to developing a self-anagement system that could genuinely represent manual workers. Those obstacles stem from the limited nature of pluralism in Yugoslav political life.

Pluralism

In some respects Yugoslavia is a highly pluralistic society. There may not be freely competing political parties, but there are multiplicity of decision-making centres (enterprises, banks, parliamentary chambers) and delegate structures, all developed as part of the highly decentralised system of self-management.

A centralised and strongly repressive regime would be very difficult to establish in view of Yugoslavia's post-war history. Non-alignment has meant easy international contacts and a fairly free flow of ideas. National diversity has created decision-making centres in the various republics. Even more significantly, the stand against Soviet domination led the Yugoslav regime to present 'Stalinism' and bureaucracy as its enemies. It has therefore always been defensive about repression and has allowed a freer press than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Masses of small publishing businesses effectively rule out pre-publication censorship.

Despite all this there is one clearly dominant organised political force — the League of Communists. Although it changed its name in 1952 from the Communist Party it is still colloquially referred to as 'the party', and with considerable justification. Although there are different positions within it — partly reflecting the national and social divisions in Yugoslav society generally — it is a centralised and disciplined organisation. This gives it immense power precisely because of the fragmentation of Yugoslav political life. It has been described as the 'institutional glue' for the potentially anarchic political and economic system. The glaring contradiction is that the maximum decentralisation is said to be essential for self-management to be meaningful, but that apparently cannot apply for the most important institution of all.

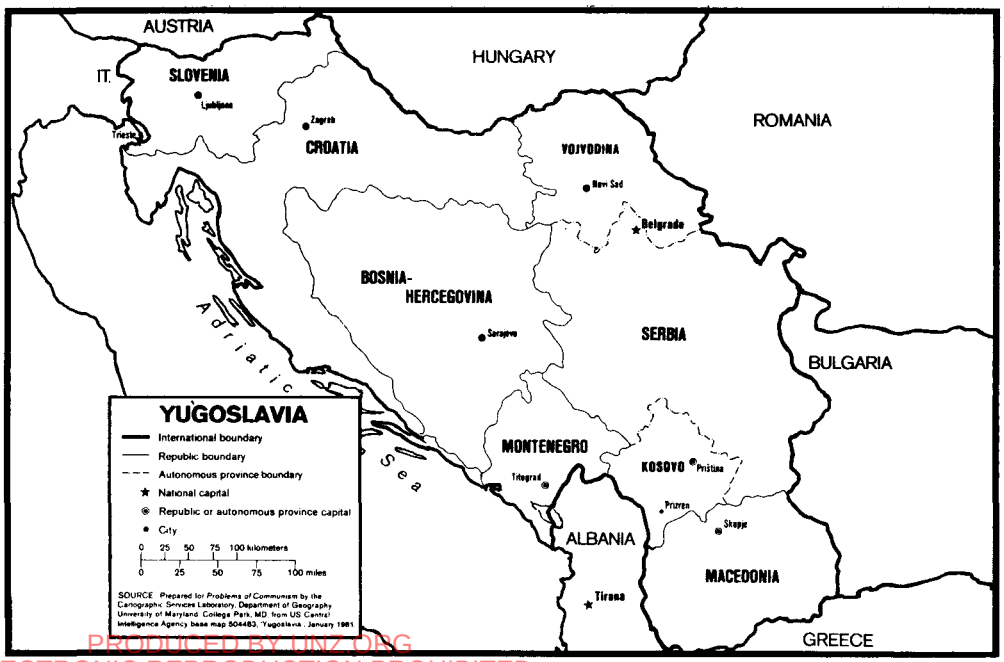
Within the government structure and in places of work, despite the constitutional position, the party is typically more powerful than self-management bodies. There have even been cases of a party organisation simply dissolving an existing workers' council and announcing new elections, although strictly speaking it has no legal power to do so. It frequently proposes the chairperson of a workers' council who is then elected unopposed. Moreover, it is through the smaller, more frequent and better organised party meetings that employees have any real opportunity to air their complaints. It is certainly only through the party that they can hope to influence decisions taken *outside* the enterprise.

Trade unions have a reputation for irrelevance. One survey in 1972 revealed that that 39% of trade union chairpersons actually did not believe that the unions had any independent function at all. In an effort to reform this it was decided in the 1974 constitution that they should be given greater powers. Nevertheless, their role was

[2] Yugoslav and Western research on this has been very extensive. I have relied especially on D Drezga, *Radnici govore o samoupravljanju* (Zagreb, 1982). The book is a collection of interviews with self-management activists.

[3] I Sifter, *Direktor iskustvo i praksa* (Belgrade, 1978), p14.

[4] Quoted in S Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito* (Cambridge, 1975), p96.



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still to be very limited centering on proposing candidates for the workers' council, 'mediating' in strikes and paying attention to the work environment.

Officially the LCY is said to be the greatest support for self-management, and it does appear that without it workers' councils would collapse amid the workers' apathy. There is, however, a real sense in which it is the crucial factor constricting organisation at the grass roots level. It is tied to justifying and defending policies decided elsewhere and its basic organisations are either dominated by managers or paralysed by splits. It may in practice be the best representative organ but the real point is that no *alternative* is available. The need for one is clearly demonstrated by the frequent strikes which are typically against arbitrary management decisions or around demands for state assistance to raise wages. A vigorous trade union organisation based on strong shopfloor organisation with a voice in social and economic policies could contribute greatly to satisfying workers' aspirations.

there has been open speculation about a possible 'Yugoslav Jaruzelski'

Economic crisis

As long as economic growth continued and living standards rose, this political structure did not suffer any serious threat. Unfortunately, however, it was itself a major cause of economic difficulties. This point is crucial. Yugoslavia was *bound* to be affected by the world recession. As a non-aligned country with a minute share in world exports (0.5%) it could never isolate itself from world problems.

Formally speaking it is a planned economy but that has little meaning. Federal planning effectively ended in 1965 when the republics failed to agree on priorities. Since then each republic has produced its own plan which is inadequately coordinated with the other republics, and is in reality nothing more than a list of targets which enterprises are free to ignore. Neither is the market mechanism an effective control because there is no real punishment for enterprises that fail.

This lack of control over enterprises encouraged excessive and wasteful investment — which rose far above the 'planned' level in the late 1970s — and that problem was compounded by a strategy in the 1970s of rapid growth in basic industries such as steel, shipbuilding, petro-chemicals and coal. The vision was of a modern, self-contained economy, but it was always over-ambitious. These industries required enormous amounts of investment and a lot of imported equipment and components. At the end of the decade Yugoslavia was saddled with a totally unsuitable economic structure for the new world conditions. The new steel and petro-chemicals industries are running at barely 50% of their capacity.

By 1980 exports were paying for only 60% of imports. The gap was made up by earnings from tourism, with money from the million Yugoslavs working abroad, and by borrowing. Debts have grown to $19bn and 35% of export earnings are now needed to service them. Drastic cutbacks in imports have caused stagnation throughout industry and cuts in living standards which stand 15% below the 1977 level; there is now rationing of a range of consumer goods and fears have grown within the leadership that they could soon face 'Polish-type' troubles.

Political uncertainty

The Yugoslav leaders have gradually been admitting the depth of the country's economic problems. In July the Government, in the face of a great deal of reluctance, pushed through parliament a long-term programme of economic stabilisation.

The economy is to be 'restructured' to improve its international competitiveness. This is to include strengthening market disciplines and encouraging firms to sack 'superfluous' workers. Even if this is successful — there is no sign of any real change yet — the prospect is of very serious problems for the rest of the decade.

The October LCY Central Committee meeting — reported as the most critical and heated ever — showed the depth of the resulting political problems. There were serious doubts about the LCY's ability to unite around and argue for so uninspring a programme. Public confidence was falling — an opinion poll in *NIN* showed 38% expressing confidence in the LCY compared with 74% in 1974 — and ordinary members were feeling 'ashamed' to come to meetings where they heard of the incompetence and corruption of leading members of their own party. They still did not believe that enough had been said to explain who really was responsible for the country's crisis. The Central Committee was deeply concerned at the prospect of a 'very painful' situation, but also deeply divided on the details of the stabilisation programme itself. At a more fundamental level the LCY was dividing on the crucia issue of what political changes might b needed to restore its standing in the face o the economic crisis.

The dominant position at the 12t Congress in June 1982 was for continuit with the policies of Tito and Kardelj. Th leadership clung to old certainties demand ing no relaxation of 'democratic centralism and emphasising 'destatisation and decent ralisation' as the basis for the future. Thi position must be unconvincing as self management cannot overcome its weak nesses without wider political changes The main alternative, which is bein mentioned increasingly frequently, is fo 'democratisation'. Outside the party publi discussion forums have mushroomed Among their active participants ar members of the former group around th journal *Praxis* which was banned in 1975 It had developed a powerful critique c existing forms of self-management an argued the need for the acceptance of permanent diversity of views within th LCY. A similar view was put by part theoretician Slobodan Inic who demande the creation of 'new organisationa structures'.[5] He complained that the LC was still rigidly centralised with 80% c activities 'ordered' from above. Only b means of a substantial reform, he argued could it be saved from an internal crisi of confidence.

There are major obstacles to suc changes. Resistance centres on the spectr of irredentist nationalism, although it i increasingly being argued by the leade ship's critics that the real fear is that th workers may 'bang their fists on the table'. There have also been clear and publi demands from army leaders for mor money to help counter possible extern threats and 'internal processes'. They ar openly concerned at the disunity of th LCY and, as the only institution organise entirely at the federal level, they could pla a much bigger role in the future.

There has been open speculation about possible 'Yugoslav Jaruzelski', but ther still are other options. Yugoslavia's ec nomic and political troubles are simply no on the same level as Poland's. Nevertheles in the past Tito and Kardeli had th prestige to initiate reforms while holdin them within limits. The current disunite leading group has so far been unable t overcome its fear that fundamental politic change might invite disaster. That sti leaves it drifting towards an uncertai future.

[5] *Danas* (a Croatian weekly) 10 August 1982.
[6] J Zupanov, *Danas* 1 November 1983.

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The NGA dispute at Warrington was a major industrial event, with far-reaching implications. Here we present two rather different assessments of what it meant.

The Unions: is There Life After Warrington?

JOHN McILROY: *A Disastrous Course*

The vote by the TUC General Council on December 16 not to support the National Graphical Association constitutes Margaret Thatcher's greatest success this side of the June election.

The immediate consequences of the affair are already apparent. The NUJ which had voted to defy an injunction granted to newspaper proprietor David Dimbleby executed a *volte-face* in the aftermath of the General Council decision and disowned its members in dispute with Dimbleby who had sacked his own printers and transferred work to the non-union firm T Baily Foreman. Surer than ever of his ground, Employment Minister Tom King explained that he was considering bringing forward new anti-closed shop laws scheduled for October and speeding up measures to restrict strikes in essential services.

The NGA episode has both weakened union resistance to the anti-union laws and the TUC's bargaining stance with the Government. If the lady *is* for turning, it won't be through smooth talking by the TUC. Len Murray's pet project has produced not only no real changes in Tory policy. It has produced no real debate.

Meaning of the legislation

The measure of the defeat for trade unionism the TUC decision represents, the extent of what has been given up in return for the mirage of productive talks, the inadequacy of any token bones which *might* be thrown to the TUC in return, can only be appreciated if we recall the role of the anti-union legislation in Thatcherite politics. The ambition of the Tories' legal strategy, its long-term consequences if successful in restricting the organisation, values and practice of British trade unionism, has commonly been underestimated even on the Left. The laws are not only intended to undermine the unique organisational base of trade unionism, through the provisions which require an 80% vote before the closed shop is legal and to weaken bargaining power by rendering illicit most of the practices needed to make industrial action effective in today's recession. The banning of solidarity action and of picketing outside the employment unit in the 1980 Act, the outlawing of 'political' disputes such as the POEU fight against privatisation in the 1982 statute and the ballots on political funds in the new trade union bill are intended to reinforce and mobilise the sectional workplace tendencies of British trade unionism, its split between the industrial and the political, *against* its striving for unity and breadth as exemplified by the relative strength of the British union centre, the TUC, and its close identification with its own creation, the Labour Party.

The Taff Vale clauses used against the NGA, which make the union and its funds responsible for its members' activities, are intended to accelerate the shift of power from shopfloor organisation to head office, a shift prompted by the industrial relations reforms and stimulated by the recession. Whilst the provisions in the new bill for secret ballots on union elections and industrial action are intended to make unions less democratic and participatory.

Using the legal process to amplify and develop its weakness and curtail its strengths, Thatcherism's project is no more or less than the remaking of British trade unionism on a domesticated US model as a helpmate for, rather than a barrier to, economic transformation.

Ambiguity

If the Tories' commitment to this strategy was apparent by the time of Prior's replacement by Tebbit so too were the problems confronting the unions' response. *The NGA debacle was no sudden betrayal. It is in the development of that response that we must look for explanations of what happened on December 16.* Heath's Industrial Relations Act had been despatched by acti from below in a period of powerful sh steward organisation and rising militan now eroded by half a decade of burgeoni unemployment and the demoralisation the social contract which laid bare t limitations of shop steward politics. T swing in power within the unions a externally to the employers plus the grea likelihood of their using the law all dictat that support would not be semi-automat It would have to be mobilised from the t Leadership and a unified response wou be essential if the laws were to immobilised.

The TUC's response sought to reconc different approaches within the unio The eight points adopted at the Wembl Special Conference in early 1982 explici grounded TUC policy in the experience the early 70s. The only way to beat the l *was to break the law.* The key point fi specifically gave the TUC General Coun power to support an affiliate in le difficulties including 'calling for industr action against the employer concerned more widely . . .'

Nonetheless comfort for the TUC Rig lay in the small print. Before supportin threatened affiliate the General Coun would have to feel that the union's ille action was both necessary and *justified.* advice on the form and *continuation* of t action would have to be accepted. If poi five contained the dynamic for confron tion, this rubric gave the General Coun room for manoeuvre, the ability to pick t right terrain for confrontation, t loopholes for a get-out. The formu represented a compromise between L and Right and provided legitimacy for range of responses making the outcome any set-piece dependent on the balance forces in the movement then prevailin

If the law was to be broken, the TU accepted the necessity for a propagan offensive to counter Thatcher's ov assault. The resulting campaign w insufficient.

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To be effective, to win minds, ideological uggle has to be anchored in a perspective action. But the thousands of union presentatives who attended the TUC's mpaign workshops during 1982 could see tle will to resist the law in practice from eir leaders. The divorce between campign rhetoric and industrial reality could ly strengthen demoralisation and cynism. In a series of cases under the 1980 t at Chloride, Aire Valley Yarns and the verpool Docks, TGWU officials accepd injunctions and urged their members to ll off action. Hot on the heels of the UC's failure to support ASLEF came the ry favourable terrain of the NHS spute. Yet when in August 1982 the ewspaper Proprietors Association obined an injunction against officials of the int unions involved in organising a 24 ur stoppage in solidarity with the spital workers, both SOGAT and the GA called off the action.

ne 9 and 'new realism'

ne inadequacies of this response, the ows the unions were suffering on the der front and the falling membership gures played their own small part in the ne 9 election defeat which in its turn engthened demoralisation at the base of e unions. The Left had failed to stop the treat. June 9 represented not the nversion of Len Murray and the TUC ight but their opportunity. It is not to rsonalise unduly to dwell on Len urray. In the tangled politics of the TUC, e full time general secretary possesses emendous potential power, particularly to itiate. The TUC's policy of 'neither war r peace', a militant posture but evasion of nfrontation in practice, had not suceded. The posture over the legislation, e alternative economic strategy, the close entification with the Labour Party, were l barriers to what Murray saw as the cipe: an aura of responsibility and closer llaboration with the Tories. Responding the demands of the TUC Right — Gavin aird, John Lyons and Alistair Graham — en Murray soon had TUC research staff riting up the justifications for the new rn. The TUC Congress in Blackpool, in s acceptance of talks with Tebbit, its jection of a tougher line on the legislation d with the election of a right majority on e General Council, proved a victory for e 'new realism.'

While the Wembley policy formally mained intact, Len Murray felt sufficiently emboldened by the time of the POEU spute in November to inform the union's ecutive that 'Congress has not yet decided that any union obeying an injunction would be contravening Congress policy . . . there was no question of the TUC setting out to break or encourage members to break the law.' The road to December 16 lay clear ahead. A matter of weeks later, Murray's desire to subvert Congress policy in pursuit of his chimera of concessions from the Tories had led to his unprecedented public condemnation of a TUC committee acting within that policy.

Favourable terrain

If Wembley and TUC opposition to the law was to have any meaning, the terrain for a conflict offered by the NGA dispute could not have been bettered. The NGA is a powerful composite disciplined organisation. It was fighting for its life. In the face of new technology, its survival depends on maintaining the closed shop and utilising industrial practices which are now illegal. It had the overwhelming support of its members. Its leadership stood firm even in the face of sequestration of the unions' assets. Industrial disputes are still won by power, not public opinion. Nonetheless, active opinion-makers across other unions widely appreciated the purpose and importance of the NGA's stand and its relevance to their own future. Picketing, secondary action and the closed shop are vital to trade unionism in other industries besides print.

Had the TUC placed itself squarely behind the NGA, these strengths could have been developed. The shennanigans in Fleet Street on 5 December when the Newspaper Proprietors Association was split down the middle on whether to confront or ignore the NGA and Maxwell's attempt to buy up Shah were small but significant signs that much of print, let alone wider industry, had little stomach for a confrontation over a small scale parvenu.

The NGA could have taken the dispute no further in isolation. Faced with the dilemma, obedience or bankruptcy, it had little alternative but to take the issue to the TUC. The balance of forces on the General Council showed itself far more fluid than generally supposed. The 29-21 vote was only assured through the support given to Len Murray and the right wing by figures such as John Morton of the Musicians Union, Les Wood of UCATT, Bryan Stanley of the POEU, and John Daly and Ada Maddox of NALGO, all voting against the letter or spirit of their own union's policy on the issue. It is pointless to conjecture as to whether or not an escalation of the dispute by the TUC could have been successful. No guarantees can be offered in any dispute in 1984. Still less one involving a direct confrontation with the state. What is clear is firstly, that the direct independent action from below of a decade ago was simply not there. And secondly, that the debate between Left and Right was never about pulling the troops out — the only way the dispute could have been won — or even attempting to try.

> the terrain for a conflict offered by the NGA dispute could not have been bettered

The battle on the General Council was formally about whether the TUC should offer the NGA good wishes and token help,

Stockport Messenger *dispute — Warrington*

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which would by no means be sufficient to win the dispute but would act as a basic gesture of solidarity and sound an end to the retreat; or, whether the NGA should simply and indecently be thrown to the wolves. *In substance it was about whether the TUC would accept that it could not break the law with the corollary that the Wembley policy would crumble and the TUC would in practice accept the new legal edifice.*

Crisis of ideas

The historical importance of December 16 is that the TUC voted to do precisely this. It is a watershed in the sense that it represents a desire to lay the memories of Pentonville and the miners overturning Heath to rest, to accept a new more limited role in society, pursuing the shadow of a tripartitism whose substance is simply not on the political agenda. The view that what happened was that the NGA just did not have a good enough case and that the next union threatened by the law will get a fair hearing is pure whimsy. What the TUC decided was that no support of any kind can be given to an affiliate if it could attract legal action. No other union is likely to put its head in the noose. Most union leaders will do their best to ensure that illegal practices do not even occur. And that is a big nail in the coffin of effective trade unionism.

a big nail in the coffin of effective trade unionism

There is a crisis of political ideas at every level in the unions. The strategy of the TUC General Council in dealing with legislation which raises basic questions about the very *nature* of trade unionism has exacerbated that crisis. It is the long term lack of political vision of the majority leadership of British trade unionism rather than some act of betrayal which is responsible for the important defeat of the NGA. Nonetheless, if a rebuilding of trade unionism cannot take place within the confines of the TUC's 'new realism', the inability of the Left to provide alternatives has contributed to that philosophy's present dominance.

A simple recreation of the limited postwar syndicalism will not suffice. The reconstruction of strong workplace organisation *is* central but this time it has to be developed on an explicit political basis. And that requires an ideological fight by the Left to redefine the purposes and methods of trade unionism in Thatcher's Britain. It is because the NGA affair places a discussion of such basic issues on the agenda that it is an opportunity as well as a defeat for socialists in the unions. □

JOHN LLOYD: *Flabby Muscles*

The industrial dispute between the National Graphical Association and the Stockport Messenger — which is still, at the time of writing, going on — has illuminated (rather than changed) very much: the nature of the changes in industrial relations law by the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts, the effect of the new electoral system on the TUC general council, the rapid and profitable spread of the giveaway newspaper industry, among others.

All of these have been at least touched on by the extensive coverage which the dispute attracted. Little mentioned, though, was a matter of particular concern to the Left: the role of *leadership* — and the response of the *led*.

The main events of the dispute will be well remembered : Mr Eddie Shah, a successful freesheet publisher, expanded his operations from its Stockport base to new plants at Bury and Warrington. Negotiations to duplicate the Stockport NGA closed shop at the new plants broke down — the NGA says Shah reneged on an agreement, Shah says the union wanted too much — and picketing of the plant began in the middle of last year. The issue became one of national significance once Shah successfully took out injunctions against the union: its refusal to obey these injunctions attracted heavy fines, still outstanding.

The TUC's role became ever more critical as the story unwound. Once it became clear that mass picketing could not halt production, the NGA approached the TUC for support: while the full extent of the support likely to be demanded never became clear, it was on the cards that it would have extended to co-ordinated industrial action, even a general strike.

The critical period was from 12-14 December. The TUC's employment policy and organisation committee meeting of the 12th produced a statement expressing a 'supportive attitude' to the NGA's call for a one-day national print strike on the 14th: Mr Len Murray, the TUC general secretary, appeared before the TV cameras in the early hours of the 13th and repudiated the statement.

On the 13th, the NGA Council called off the strike, saying that Murray's 'divisi remarks had put in doubt the unit support they had previously said they m have. On the 14th, the General Council, an initial vote of 29 to 21, backed Murr much to the disgust of the NGA (Mr J Wade, its general secretary, called it ' and sympathy') and most of the TUC's l wing. In taking the decision it did, t Council not only scrapped any prospects TUC-organised support for the pr union, but implicitly underpinned 'within the law' policy of reason opposition to the Conservative governm and to its legislation.

Legitimacy

One further point needs to be made, a gloss to the brief rehearsal of facts. T debates in and around the TUC — a they were the sharpest heard for some ye — revolved round two opposing poles, bc of which claimed democratic primacy. T Left based its case for supporting the NC on the decisions taken by the special TU conference at Wembley in April 1982: particular, resolution five, which comm ted the TUC to give support to unio combatting the Employment Acts (provi ing their cause was good).

The Centre and Right argued that tim had changed since Wembley, and that t decisions of the 1983 Congress, whi together prescribed a policy of negotiati with the Government rather than confro tation, effectively superceded all el Because, in the way of the TUC, both s of resolutions were still extant (though bo in effect contradictory) both sides cou and did argue *de jure:* and once the L lost, it could and does claim that t majority reneged on decisions solemn taken and commitments fervently made. is, of course, correct to do so: as correct the Right would have been had they ma the same claims in the event of a rever decision. The *de jure* point, it is clear, h more to do with the untidy habit which t TUC has of leaving contradictory resol tions extant than with the hard facts of t case.

We thus come to the core of the matte irrespective of either set of decisions, wh were the prospects for labour moveme support for the NGA? And was it a failu of leadership by the TUC majority in faili to provide it? There are a number of poir which can be made in answer to the questions, but two are particularly powe ful: one specific, one general.

The closed shop

First, and specifically: the core of t

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rA-Shah dispute was an argument over closed shop, and that argument was not : on which a convincing campaign could based.

The closed shop, or more politely, the on membership agreement, is at its ɔngest in the print. There, it is a system, ay of life, with more than two centuries radition to support it. Linking in with apprenticeship system for craft prin-ɨ, the NGA runs pre-entry closed shops l enforced unionisation in peripheral ıting areas by refusing to accept work ginating from non-union houses. It resents one of the most complete and cessful forms of workers' — or more urately, union — control in the country, l has been accepted as such by ployers.

The 1980 and 1982 Acts were clearly ng to make life difficult for the print ɔve all other industries, because of their ıcentration on the closed shops and their ıs on secondary action. Unions can no ger enforce unionisation in suppliers' ɔps, nor can they picket to force a npany to conclude a closed shop (from ɨ November at the latest, only those sed shops which gain at least 80% ɔport from their members will remain ful).

The NGA-type shops, which probably joy very strong support where they are ll established (as in the national wspaper industry), can carry on 'busi-ss as usual' only when an employer does t challenge them. Where one does — like ah — and where, like Shah, he can show at the employees to be covered by a *new* ɔsed shop would prefer not to, the law ıkes the union position a difficult one. ther it resorts to mass picketing to force e employer to conclude by damaging his ısiness, or it declines the fight, and sees a dge being driven deeper and deeper into e national system. The particular stance of the freesheet industry, estab-hing itself as a national industry in leaps d bounds, and already, in one or two ry quiet instances, managing to evade ıionisation is one where a burgeoning ctor meets traditional practices and is oner or later bound to collide.

oblems of defence

ew technology adds a further complicat-g element. Computerised typesetting and ake-up is not the panacea for the industry is held to be by equipment producers and me printing companies: the old hot etal, for example, is probably at least as ficient in national newspapers on the esent state of the art. But it does offer scope for reductions in labour and it does render the apprenticeship system anachronistic; overnight, it equates the (considerable) skill of a young woman secretary with the (considerable) skill of a typesetter. The secretary's question — why should I earn anything between a half and *a tenth* (in Fleet Street) for a job which is much more than keyboarding compared to a man who is merely keyboarding? — becomes quite legitimate.

In research on the closed shop soon to be published, Professor John Gennard and Steven Dunn show (a) that the closed shop is on the wane, largely because of unemployment and (b) the 'softer' closed shops, concluded in the last 20 or 30 years by agreement between management and union officials without the active participation of the membership, are clearly threatened by the soon-to-be-enacted provision that they must secure at least 80% support. It is possible, in short, that *individual choice* — the ideology which informs the present trade union bill — will cut down the closed shop population to half or even less of its presently estimated 4.5m total.

All of this means that defence of the closed shop is and will become even more difficult: and that a head-on insistence that workers must join one, like it or not, is unlikely to succeed. It is perfectly right to argue, as union officials have done, that industrial negotiation is a hard business and that some coercion must be used by unions on workers for their own ultimate good and to counter the much greater coercion (of redundancies, for example) which the employer can bring to bear — but such an argument depends on success. The benefits of the closed shop are apparent to some workers in them, but not to all; and not to very many at all who are outside of them. Further, to dismiss individual choice as merely a cynical rhetorical prop used by a hostile government to destroy unions is to ignore the fact that everyone wishes to exercise choice, and that some at least will choose against unions not because they are right wing stooges but because they have been given no reason to choose for them. Mr Mick McGahey has at times inveighed against the checkoff system as being one which stripped the unions of necessary contact between members and activists. That system can have the same effect as the closed shop (to which it is often linked in agreements): it makes unions lazy about their members.

Lack of general support

The general point is this. Democracy in unions or in society is a hard taskmaster. Assent to a particular line, or a particular candidate, is not won once and for all — it must constantly be renewed and refreshed. It depends, more and more, on responsiveness to often contradictory demands, and a willingness to reshape structures to accommodate them. Crucially, and especially when the unions are under great strain, it demands on the part of union officials and activists a close attention to the real needs and desires of their members and prospective members, rather than a dogmatic assumption about their interests.

the closed shop makes unions lazy about their members

Luciano Lama, the general secretary of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (GCIL) tends to stress this latter point in speeches and articles. Unions, he says, have no use for the ideal worker, the perpetual militant of a social realist poster: they must confront the real person, with all the given prejudices, conservatism, awkwardness and contradictory desires a real person has.

For the present, the union movement is in retreat: the permanent or temporary nature of that fact is to a very great extent in the unions' own hands. In very difficult circumstances, they must regain assent for their programmes and philosophies from a very broad section of workers who are either indifferent or even hostile to their activities. There are no guidelines for those activities, and certainly a simple reliance on old muscles which have now gone flabby will simply lead to embarrassing collapses.

Thus the Left's assumption that all that was lacking for a successful prosecution of the NGA dispute was firm, militant leadership is very wrong indeed, wrong because of the specific cause of the dispute and wrong because of the general approach. The active assent of the majority to militant action of the kind proposed was not and is not available, and the Centre and Right of the TUC saved the NGA and the Left from the considerable embarrassment of asking for it. Before it can tackle such massive tasks as attempting to render legislation inoperative, the union movement must set about the more humble business of making sure its members do not melt away in major industrial areas and ensuring that its activists do not become dispirited and cynical. A recognition that something like the outcome we witnessed of the NGA dispute was inevitable would do much to assist these humble and necessary tasks. □

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PANTO PANTO

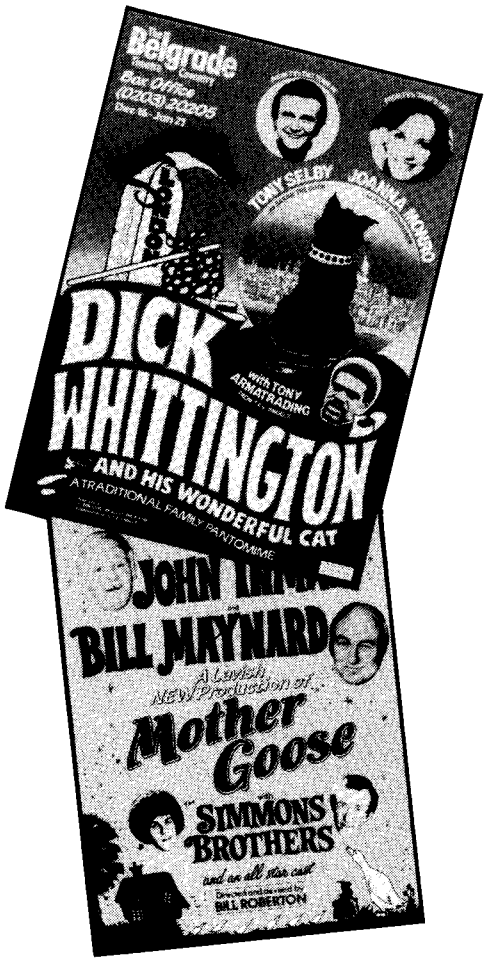
Richard Dyer

Pantomimes are usually associated with Christmas and that is certainly their peak period, but pantos go on being performed long into the New Year, often as late as April or early May. This is one reason why it is still worth stopping to think about the pantomime phenomenon in February.

It is a phenomenon. Pantomime is about the nearest theatre can get to being a mass popular form. Though more people will have watched Cilla's Christmas Eve show on TV than will see her in *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Birmingham Hippodrome in the whole of its run, still something like the number who watched her on TV will see a pantomime of some sort in the course of the year. And given the formulaic nature of pantomime, this means that it is an experience of live entertainment shared on a mass scale throughout the population, putting it nearly in the same league as football.

There are two sorts of professional pantomime. There are the long running shows in the large commercial theatres, usually involving several spectacular changes of scenery and starring big names from television and pop music — Les Dawson in *Cinderella* at Wolverhampton, John Inman in *Mother Goose* at the Alexandra, Birmingham, Dana as *Snow White* in London. These stars are often backed up by performers who work mainly in clubs and seaside variety. Dames in particular are often drawn from this source — Lambert and Ross as the Ugly Sisters in Wolverhampton, Wyn Calvin as Jack's mother at the Hippodrome, Birmingham and so on. Then there is usually also a sprinkling of speciality acts, jugglers, acrobats, puppeteers, dancers, conjurors, and nearly always a troupe of little girls recruited from local dancing school.

This is the most familiar kind of pantomime, and it is generally the one that purists bemoan. Commentators have spoken of a revival of pantomime this year — but the big pantos of the kind just described are no more nor no less than in previous years. When people speak of a revival, what they mean is productions of pantomimes that come closer, it is supposed, to what pantomimes were like before they degenerated into a string of star turns, speciality acts and vulgar set-pieces. The 'revived' pantomime is the province of the repertory theatres, and the talk of revival has been boosted because the main London rep, the National Theatre, has put on *Cinderella* this year. Rep pantos are often advertised as 'traditional', and these



days who says 'traditional' means 'Victorian'. The virtues of the traditional pantomime are thus a clear-cut morality, fidelity to the story and above all a commitment to pantomime as entertainment for children.

It seems to me questionable just how much of a virtue these qualities are. Purists like the clear-cut morality because it gets away from the use of stars like Les Dawson or Danny La Rue who introduce an unsavoury note into the proceedings. Yet the morality of some of the panto stories is itself dubious. Is it so very admirable to base a story, as does *Cinderella*, around female aspirations seen in terms of rejecting people of your own class (Buttons) and relentless mockery of those who don't fit the social norms of attractiveness (the Ugly Sisters)? What is so very wonderful about Dick Whittington's entrepreneurial capitalism based on quasi-imperialist exploitation? Given these kinds of plot line, th is something splendidly corrosive about Dawson's relentlessly glum and vul presence amid the tatty pretty-pretty *Cinderella*.

Respect for the story means interruptions, inconsistencies, incoher ces. The special advantage of pantomi however is that you don't need to bot too much about the story. The fact t most children know the story backwa before they go to a show means that don't need to worry about the telling of This can be a rich source of by-play w the audience. When I saw *Jack and Beanstalk*, a child in the audience endlessly shouting out the information t Cilla Black as Jack was just about impart, interruptions that both tested professional skill at repartee and impro ation and caught audience and cast i recognition of the fun of play-acting a story-telling both were engaged in.

Equally the very rigid formulaic nat of pantomime makes it a gift for scho churches and any other organisations party branches, trade unions, wome groups, left theatre groups — as extraordinarily malleable form that can used to say and include anything with becoming incomprehensible. Any amo of local or political reference can be put masses of in-jokes (as long as they're in w the audience and not just the cast) a topical references. This slack, open qual of panto can be an excuse for rehearsing the audience, the cast merely joking amo themselves, the whole thing merely a me But at its best — in Droitwich Hi School's *Little Red Riding Hood*, instance — it is the occasion for a qu astonishing range of reference, a r richness of association linking famil school figures (the teachers), the wi community (Droitwich and around) a pop culture (as in the sudden appearance Batman, Spiderman, Superman et al) secured in place by the familiarity of t underlying tale.

Panto is about interruption, boisterou ness, a sharing in *making* believe. Wh you boo at the villain, when you go 'a about Cinders' rejection of Buttons, wh you watch Jack climb the beanstalk clinging on to a bit of scenery, you b believe and don't believe that its 'real', y knowingly join in that great capacity of human mind that no-one really seems understand, that of pretending.

I've been looking so far at the argume levelled against the big commercial pan

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the champions of traditional (and pectable) pantomime. For a long time, ıtomime has also been despised on the ft (if it's been thought about at all). alyses of the stories, of the heavy handed d demonstrated above, have usually :n the main objection to pantomime. is seems a pity. Pantomime's love interruptions, sudden switches of od, gaps in the story and so on make it, he level of form, one of the few kinds of ssroots Brechtian theatre that survives. sides, are the stories so irredeemable for ialist and feminist entertainment?

Two aspects of the stories seem ticularly vulnerable to left criticism. e is that all pantos are about uisitiveness (a cardinal traditional/Vic-ian virtue), about the desire for and ting of wealth. Socialists have always :n unhappy about wealth, because in our iety wealth for some invariably means verty for others. Yet the dream of edom from want, of luxuriating in the ıuousness that material well-being can ng — there is nothing intrinsically wrong h that. Given how many pantoplots rely on luck and magic as the source of alth, and that characters like Aladdin and Jack are very clearly representatives of the people who could be shown sharing their goood fortune . . . OK, they aren't usually shown sharing it, they hang on to their wealth for themselves and the chorus of villagers from scene one become flunkies and maids in waiting in the finale. But the point is that this is not necessary, the story could be inflected differently without any loss of spectacle or pleasure.

The second forceful objection to panto focuses on the dame and the principal boy. These seem like the very heartland of sexism. The dame is every grotesque and morbid projection of male ideas about women, the principal boy a lifeless character whose main function is to show her legs to the dads in the audience. This is how they generally are, but not the only way they need be or indeed always are. In the charming *Aladdin* at Redditch, the dame came at times as close to being a non-sexist dame (while still being very funny) as I've seen. Little of his humour focused on questions of her appearance, the usual obsession of most dame's humour; much of his humour dealt with the problems of being a widow, the difficulties of shopping in Redditch and so on; the fact that it was a man communicating this about women suggested that what the jokes were about were the social position of women, not their 'nature'; and the audience loved her, as they do most dames — she is a positive figure in popular imagery.

As for the principal boy (who is quite often played by a man now, as in Redditch's rather Blue Peter-ish Aladdin), 'he' can be nothing but a pair of fish-net stockings, but again doesn't have to be. The principal boy is the ultimate tomboy, a strong female identification figure for the audience. It is really something to see Cilla as Jack fight and defeat macho Gareth Hunt at the Giant's wicked henchman. We know Jack (or Dick, or Sinbad, or whoever) is a boy and it is boys who do things like that; but we know also that the person up there on stage is a woman and it is she who is being vigorous and splendid and heroic.

As with so much popular culture, the potential is there in panto to be used and developed by socialists and feminists. We need to respect its pleasures, especially its less respectable ones, to get inside them and make them our own. Entertainment is too serious to be left to the Right.

CINEMA FROM THREE CONTINENTS

Roy Armes

ıough well over half the world's films ve been made in Asia, Latin America d the Arab states for the past 30 years or ore, we are allowed only a distorted view all this production by the Western ominated media of distribution. Last ovember saw two contrasting cultural itiatives designed to combat this imbal-ce: the London Third Eye Festival and e Nantes Festival des Trois Continents. The Third Eye's collection of films was ankly eclectic. On the one hand there ere classics like Youssef Chahine's 1963 *ladin* (interesting in its reversal of ollywood casting, in that here all the usaders are played by Egyptians in wigs) d the Chilean Manuel Littin's compelling 69 study of the contradictions of justice a reactionary state, *The Jackal of ahueltoro*. On the other hand Third Eye fered a sprinkling of newly completed ovies, such as the Indian drama *Phaniyamma*, which opened the festival, and the Ghanaian *Kukuratumi*, a tale of the corrupting influence of the big city, which was receiving its world premiere. But the overall standard was variable and the Third Eye festival's symposium on issues in Third World cinema was of greater interest, not least in the problems of definition which it raised.

The term 'Third World' can be defined in a number of ways and, as the organisers rightly observed in the material perpared for the symposium, a mere geographical delimitation is inadequate. Obviously there is a unity of interest as well as an instinctive sympathy linking representatives of, say, the black community here with the Third World. But the precise nature of this unity with regard to cinema needs to be explored, since, as the symposium material recognises, the content of films, the issues they raised and the format they adopt may all differ. The necessary starting point for a politically orientated London-based festival must surely be an exploration of these differences, so that local participants and representatives from abroad can define their position and devise ways of acting in practical unison. Instead, the beguilingly neat but treacherously ambiguous title 'Third Eye' tended to blur crucial distinctions and proclaim a spurious unity of purpose. This led to constant confusion

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in the symposium, where speakers often referred to 'Third World cinema' when they really meant socially and politically committed cinema carried on anywhere in the world.

Links between activist film-makers throughout the developed and underdeveloped world are one thing and demand a certain vocabulary; Third World cinema is quite another and demands its own definitions. As it turned out, a gathering which had never considered the contradiction of a Third World festival in a traditional capital of imperialism was aggravated by some narrowly sectarian position-taking,and the drafting of the final symposium declaration led to such absurdities as a small group of largely London-based representatives *demanding* that *all* Third World film makers 'should critically assess the representation of women in the films they produce'.

It is instructive to contrast the Third Eye approach with that adopted by the organisers of Europe's festival of Third World cinema, the Festival des Trois Continents in Nantes, which this year celebrated its fifth anniversary. Nantes is in no way a model of what a festival in London should ideally be, but its complementary strengths and weaknesses do highlight some of the problems of presenting Third World cinema in the West. Though its selection of films was as wide ranging as that of the Third Eye — with films from 20 countries and works by Chinese, Chicano and Black Americans — the Nantes Festival defines its position in quite different terms. 'It is the discovery and re-discovery of film makers and national cinemas — outside any political, sociological or other considerations — which guides us', proclaims the programme. The films themselves, rather than debates about issues in Third World cinema, are the central focus and these are presented in various categories: a director retrospective (the Chinese director, Xie Jin), the panorama of a national cinema (Mexico) and a selection of thirty or so films from the 1980s. Certainly the Festival's strength lies in its ability to find large and enthusiastic audiences of local people for this wide range of film-making in the five local cinemas chosen for screenings. The Festival has achieved the status of an event: it receives wide coverage in the local press and on local radio and television, and over the years it has established its reputation with the Paris-based specialist film critics. The ability to set up a dialogue between film-makers, specialist critics and ordinary spectators is one of the most valuable aspects of Nantes's success. Even if its focal point — the Olympia Cinema — reverts to screenings of James Bond on December 30, during the whole previous week Third World films have been seen by an enthusiastic popular audience.

Nantes's overtly non-political stance has been valuable in allowing the Festival to survive a change in municipal party control from a supportive left-wing administration to a right-wing one. But this stance seems to go hand-in-hand with a retreat from all questions of a critical nature. Obviously the retrospective and historical panorama both offer unique opportunities for viewing works rarely available in Europe, but the effect is very much like similar seasons at our own National Film Theatre. Underlying both are critical assumptions which any concern with Third World cinema ought to demolish: the notions of the autonomous national cinema and the primacy of the director's personality as the key organising principle of his or her work. As far as the Mexican films shown this year at Nantes are concerned, the presence of a 1950s Mexican star, Ninon Sevilla, in no way compensated for the lack of discussion and documentation on the context of US economic and cultural dominance, which alone makes the history of Mexican cinema comprehensible. Similarly, the Chinese director Xie Jin was not treated as a film-maker whose work can throw light on the achievements and contradictions of Chinese society over the past 25 years, but as a celebrity 'author' to be fêted and interviewed incessantly (a process he found totally bewildering on this, his first trip to Europe).

Though there were few really outsta ing films from the past year or so on dis at Nantes, the competition and informa sections did offer a view of Third W cinema in all its diversity. From a mo Thai epic, *Son of the North East*, based novelist's autobiographical account of peasant childhood, and a coy South Kor tale of charcoal burners, *Son of the Cuc* to the Indonesian domestic drama, *Be the Mosquito Net*, and a suicidal tale of disintegration of a black African facing ist pressures in Japan, *L'Homme D'aille* these films offer a heterogeneous ref tion of Third World society in all contradictory uneven developement. internal difficulties triggered off attempts at modernisation indeed forn the explicit background to two of the fi on display: the Upper Voltan *Jours Tourmentes*, dealing with the project build a well in a rural community, *Derman* which focusses on an Ankara-b midwife sent to a remote Turkish mount community. These films offer uniqu accessible insights into the countries which they were produced through conception of entertainment which t display as much as through the shaping their narrative.

Of even greater interest in this resp are those films sponsored by official st film production organisations. A willi ness on the part of the Brazilian authorit to bring into focus (if only obliqu through a 1940s setting) issues direc relevant to the years of military rule see to be shown by the unrelenting look at perpetrators of political violence, focussi on a police sergeant in the arid Nordeste *Sargento Getulio*. The films from In vividly reveal the contradictions in its fi

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icy. Though wielding enormous power ɔugh its monopoly of film importation, National Film Development Corpora- ı makes no attempt to force its own ductions on Indian exhibitors through a ɔta scheme. As a result many of its ductions exist only in a sort of cultural bo, denied an audience in India and eiving at best occasional screenings at ivals or Indian Film Weeks abroad. An mple here is Sirander Nath Dhir's tere study of an intransigent bureau- cy, *Pratishodh*, shaped by the influence Bresson and Straub so typical of the duates of the Indian Film Institute at ne. More striking still was the Algerian ering, *Les Folles Années du Twist*, produced by the state monopoly, ONCIC. What is one to make of an Algerian government which sponsors this view of the FLN struggle as a mindless, cultureless farce (an Arab *Carry On Up the Revolution*)? Or of its director, Mahmoud Zemmouri, who justifies it as a true reflection of the boredom and indifference of the young Algerians of today towards the ideals of their revolution?

Unlike Third Eye, which chooses its films fairly indiscriminately from 20 years of Third World production, Nantes is a competitive festival awarding a prize each year to a film not previously screened in France. Clearly this can be advantageous both in attracting a high level of films and in offering some tangible help (however small) to a struggling Third World film maker. But the experience this year showed strikingly the need to have clear social and political criteria for selection. Lacking such criteria, the serious and worthwhile Nantes Festival plunged into absurdity by awarding its top prize to Lino Brocka's three year old *Angela Markado*. While one can feel solidarity with Brocka's efforts in the political opposition to the Markos regime in the Philippines, there can be no excuse for selecting this film, which is no more than a slickly made vigilante movie of the most sickeningly exploitative kind, a Filippino equivalent of Michael Winner's *Death Wish*.

BROOKSIDE

Christine Geraughty

.p opera is a despised genre. Mention ssroads, *Triangle*, *Angels* or *Emmerdale m* and back come words like 'boring', mourless', 'unbelievable', 'contrived'. makers either refuse to acknowledge t they work in the genre — 'it's an ır's drama a week, with all the antages of a cumulative tradition,' said of *Coronation Street's* producers — or nit it with a resigned awareness that it l win them no professional kudos. On Left, serials are seen as at best mildly lictive rubbish; at worst as a distraction m the serious issues which have to be kled. It is a common criticism that by ıcentrating on the personal world of love, rriage and the family, serials ignore the ıl' world of work, trade unions, employment and class. 'Ugly social ıes are *reduced to* the level of private, ıily melodrama,' (my italics) writes Carl rdner in *City Limits* on how *Coronation eet* handles unemployment. No one pushes it further, to question why the fictional affairs of Ken, Deirdre and Mike Baldwin should capture the imagination and the headlines, or challenges the patronising criticism of the audience which is implied in the ready dismissal of soap operas as 'escapist' because they deal with personal relationships.

In such a situation it was encouraging to hear that Channel 4 was prepared to invest £3m in a twice-weekly soap opera, produced by Phil Redmond whose commitment to the serial format had been apparent in his work on *Grange Hill* and *Staying On*. Redmond was keen, however, to emphasise *Brookside's* difference from the other British serials. It would deal with personal problems but it would not be 'a romanticised interpretation of life but will be a reflection of contemporary Britain with a sharp edge, tackling issues of unemployment, feminism, motivation and divorce.' In another interview, Redmond argues that 'people will accept and actually want programmes that tell the truth and show society as it really is.' What is interesting about *Brookside* then is that it shares the Left's general criticism of soap opera, articulates the realist aesthetic which lurks behind such criticism and offers the possibility (although I think Redmond would deny it) of a progressive soap opera.

Certainly, *Brookside* is different from the other serials in its format, the stories it deals with and the characters it represents. Serials such as *Angels*, *Coronation Street* and *Crossroads* are very much based on the notion of a community — a street or a shared place of work — in which each character has a place. Stories often depend on disagreements and quarrels between characters but at times of celebration or distress the serials offer us a resolution through a community response which is generated across family, age or class divisions. When it started, *Brookside* resolutely set itself against this approach and presented us with a number of families which were clearly delineated in terms of

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class and whose men, at least, were mutually antagonistic. There is no common pub where the characters meet 'naturally' — Redmond argues that this would be unrealistic — and there is little opportunity for the exchange of gossip and information across the family boundaries which is so characteristic of other serials. There is some evidence that this decision has caused difficulties in that the families in *Brookside* seemed to be living their lives in parallel rather than sharing common experiences. The introduction of Alan as a character who is equally at ease with the Collins and the Grants and a greater emphasis on joint activity — the jumble sale in support of the factory workers, for example — are indications of a change in approach.

Brookside probably signals most clearly its difference from other serials in the type of story it is willing to take on. It has consistently tried to use issues like strikes, redundancies, unemployment and union activity as a source of stories and character motivation. *Brookside* began with Bobby Grant's involvement in a strike at the factory and recent stories have centred on the fight to prevent the factory's closure. Such stories have been handled with considerable complexity and Bobby's role as an able shop steward who could take on a full-time union job has been both supported and criticised by characters within the programme. In addition, *Brookside*, even after the first flurry over four letter words had died down, has taken a more open approach to stories centering on sexual relationships. The treatment of Petra's relationship with Barry Grant, after Gavin's death, fully used the serial form's capacity to explore her shifting emotions and response to a new sexual relationship in a way which was moving and unusual.

The other major difference in *Brookside* is the way in which it represents groups which are not normally given much space or sympathy in serials — men and adolescents. The other serials tend to be dominated by women characters but in *Brookside* the characters of Bobby and Barry Grant, Paul Collins and even Alan Partridge are crucial in terms of the stories built around them and the space given to their opinions. Redmond's previous work has been marked by an interest in the shift from childhood to adolescence and much attention is paid in *Brookside* to the lifestyle, attitudes and problems of young people. Within this group, however, the weighting towards males is even more strongly marked and the departure of Lucy has left a gap which has been filled by more attention being given to the activities of Damon Grant, Gordon Collins and their almost exclusively male friends.

This change in the range of stories and characters would seem to be an attempt to win over a new audience for Channel 4's serial. Soap opera is one of the few TV genres for which the audience is assumed to be women. It is seen as women's fiction which men may watch but not really get involved with. *Brookside* has been concerned to win new viewers and Redmond has said that the programme gets a good response from young people. Nevertheless the combination of a realist aesthetic and a search for new audiences has meant that *Brookside* has lost some of the pleasures and possibilities which other serials offer, particularly to their women viewers.

Women characters are central to soap operas. They are not peripheral to the stories; they are not mysterious, enigmatic or threatening as they so often are in thrillers and crime series. They are the norm by which the programme is understood and every soap opera has at its heart women characters who are strong, independent, living their own lives, making their own decisions in a way which makes the men seem clumsy and inept. The women handle the complex web of relationships that make up a soap opera with a care and intensity which recognises the importance of close relationships and celebrates the undervalued skills of women in handling them. *Brookside*, because of its other concerns, has never had this full blooded commitment to its women characters. It does take on women's issues — infertility, pregnancy, low pay — but the way in which it represents women seems to reinforce sexual stereotyping rather than to challenge it. Whereas most serials concentrate on the personal world, *Brookside* also tries to operate in the public arena and gives more attention to what are defined as public problems. Women are almost always excluded from these activities. Of the main women characters, only Heather Huntingdon has a job outside the home; there is no attempt to represent women working in the factory or organising in the unions. It is Bobby Grant who is the shop steward; his wife, Sheila, one of the strongest women characters, is not even a union member. The norm is relentlessly that of the married couple, with or without children, with the women taking on the traditional roles of cleaning, cooking and maintaining the family relat ships. The public world of work unions is represented as being exclusi male and the women are presentec supporting their men rather than chall ing them.

The strongest relationships wi *Brookside* are within the families. One ef of this is that there is little sense of wor sharing common experiences across barriers of class and family. Serials are b on gossip and conversations and i striking how rarely the women in *Brook* talk to each other. Their most intin conversations tend to occur within fam — mother and daughter or between sis — and only the middle class Heathe seen to have a close woman friend. The some evidence that the programme is ing to change in this respect but at moment there is little of the casual macy that marks the relationship betw Mavis and Rita in *Coronation Street* or and Barbara in *Crossroads*, that sens being down among the women where possible to look at the male world fro female perspective. And while it may more realistic to show the nagging Ma endlessly washing the children's clothe is hard to see what pleasure women being offered in such representations.

It is revealing to compare *Brookside* v *Angels* which has just finished a tv weekly run on BBC1. There is a tende to assume that because *Brookside* is Channel 4 and centres on working c families it will automatically be the n interesting of the current British seri But *Angels*, because of its hospital setti has been able to take on stories ab unions, privatisation and the cuts in pu services, without abandoning the sp usually given to women in serials. It handled stories of rape, abortion childbirth with considerable frankness has shown women challenging doctors v tell them what's best for their own bod *Brookside's* commitment to realism, concern to show how working class pec really live, is in tune with the comn response on the Left to what is felt to misrepresentation by the media genera *Brookside* has succeeded in the difficult t of establishing itself as a serial, and presentation of the Grant family particular has been a real challenge to ot serials. But the way in which it represented women is a salutory remin that the conventions and pleasures of m traditional soap operas should not be lightly discarded.

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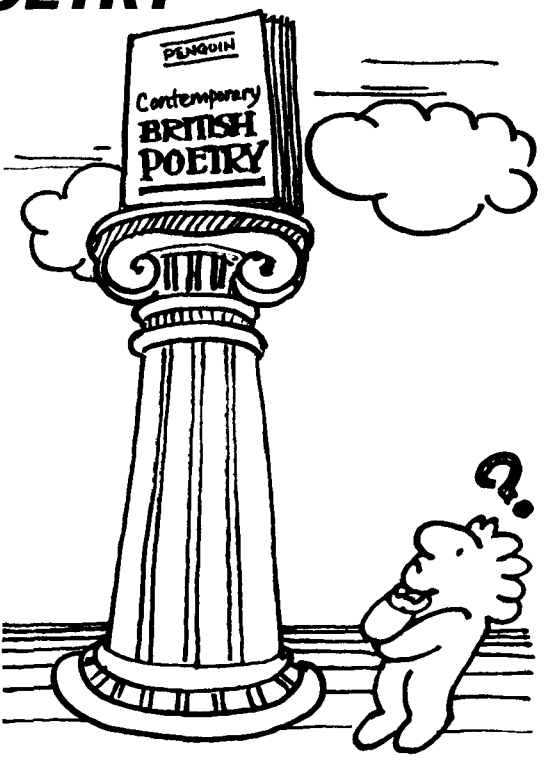
Spotlight

THE TROUBLE WITH POETRY

Michèle Roberts



ere is a prevalent view in white culture the poet as droopy decadent self-ulgent aesthete shrinking from political nge and hiding from the real world to banal or unintelligible laments about nal truths. Poetry is set up in osition to politics; people working in itics think poetry has nothing to do with m.

The romantic image of the absinthe-lling velvet-cloaked garret-dwelling out-er separates the poet as hero and phet from ordinary people. It also ceals the fact that most poets are poor enjoy their poverty no more than other rived persons. And this romantic view, ile to some extent feminising the poet (so t some skinhead poets I know need to ssure their audiences that you can ain a Real Man despite scribbling ming couplets), completely denies the stence of women poets, who may also be thers hard at work in, and perhaps also side, the home.

Poetry was once an oral art practised in olic. Lullabies, ballads, riddles, curses l chants were shaped and passed on by inary women and men as well as by fessionals. Though poetry has become, ce the fourteenth century, increasingly ociated with books written and read by literate elite, the oral tradition has ntinued boldly on, in this country vering anew since the war to produce a n variety of poets.

Marxist theory speaks of man controlling ure, has no concepts to deal with gender l sexual difference, and tacitly accepts idea of woman as part of nature to be ntrolled and exploited for man's ends: rally hundreds of women break into try to demonstrate that by accepting we e bodies and are part of nature, we ate culture and press for change. Poets Alison Fell, Judith Kazantzis, Michel-Wandor, Janet Dube, Stef Pixner, lian Allnutt and Berta Freistadt perform ir work in pubs, clubs, cafés, meetings l bookshops across the country.

A similar upsurge of black poets has urred. The experience of oppression in s country backed up by whites' attempts deny it has led black poets to mine the nes of Caribbean culture and mix proud gry words with music to testify to their need and determination to survive racism and celebrate a history whites would rather forget. Lynton Kwesi Johnson, now internationally known through his live appearances and his albums, recently completed a successful national tour with Manchester bard John Cooper Clarke, thus proving that black and white can cooperate. He is just one among many: John Agard, Grace Nichols, James Berry, Keith Jefferson, to name but a few.

Some white working-class poets go so far as to declare that poetry is dead and long live rant. The Ranters, drawn from north and south, include Attila the Stockbroker, Joolz, Seething Wells, Little Brother, Little Dave; they draw on the tradition of scurrilous ballads in rhyme and, like the other groups, produce their own fanzines and magazines.

I emphasise that the lists of names above are short owing to the constraints of space, and apologise to all the poets whose names I have omitted. The current poetry revival challenges elitism: any selection of poets is invidious, and in this case is based on my experience as a white feminist.

The public role of the new generation of radical poets is, oddly enough, aided by the current recession. As theatre companies close for lack of funds and grants, so the actors involved have re-formed into variety acts performing at the many cabarets which have sprung up across London and other large cities and which offer a cheap night out: beer and music, mime, comedy, poetry and backchat.

This is very different from the hushed churchly atmosphere associated with traditional poetry readings where the emphasis remains on the written text read from rather than performed in a mixed-media entertainment setting. Instead of welcoming the diversity of choice now available, which reflects our multi-cultural society, some establishment poets ignore it. The recently published Penguin anthology *Contemporary British Poetry*, for example, caused a furore by concentrating solely on the work of a small elite group of poets (all white and mostly male) and omitting all the poets discussed above. And there are still plenty of critics happy to disdain as tainted or corrupt poetry that is in any way connected to politics, to dismiss feminist poets as shrill hysterics, and to patronise working-class and black poets as occasionally interesting minority inhabitants of a peripheral zoo.

These new poets are frightening, subversive and dangerous. Radical poetry heals the splits our culture inflicts as necessary (common-sense) wounds between intellect and body, man and woman, mother and revolutionary, conscious and unconscious, theory and ideology. Radical poetry tries to speak what has been unspeakable: working-class, black and female experience. The Left is not always comfortable with this. Nor am I: other poets give me disturbing, shifting images which don't correspond to my yearnings for simple socialist-feminist heroism. Radical poetry allows the unconscious back in. Labelling it as irrational, opposing it to scientific theory doesn't make it go away. Poetry makes us laugh or shudder or weep or desire when perhaps we'd rather fantasise controlling the world through a political language which is almost never playful and inventive. The Right understands the power of the unconscious and exploits it in rituals and ideology, utilises the energy of repressed yearnings and conflicts. If we on the Left want to unblock more of our creative energy for change, we need to let poetry (a way of thinking, of understanding, of being) back into our politics.

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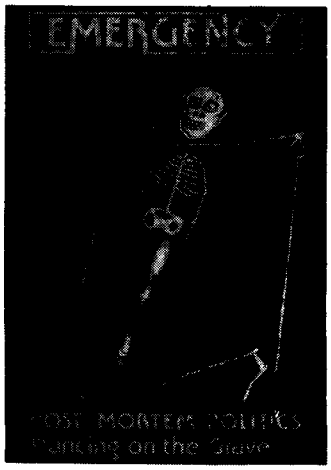

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:Conservatives' sweeping parliamentary ory in 1983 makes the Thatcher ernment likely to be the most durable ty administration since the Conservative ernments of the 1950s. But how manent are the changes that Thatcher- has brought? Is Conservatism once in dominant and unassailable? Will a ond term see the major reshaping of ish economy and society promised by Thatcherites substantially achieved? ohn Ross provides a bold, at times athtaking, survey of the rise and decline he Conservative party during the last years. His aim is to lay bare the nomic determinants of Conservative tics and electoral support, and he usses the changing recruitment of nservative MPs and cabinets, the nging source of funds for the Conserv- e Party, the relationship of the party to leading sectors of British capital, and long term trends of the party's electoral port. Among many striking facts he igs out is the close match between those panies that fund the Tory party and the ors that have prospered during the ession, and he shows how these sectors e historically been the dominant ions of British capital. Though some is conclusions and interpretations will challenged, the amassing of so much erial in such a readable and concise n is invaluable. This is the best short dbook on the Conservative Party that rently exists.

'eter Riddell is the Political Editor of the *ancial Times* and has written a very erent kind of book. This is a careful and ailed examination of the actual record of Thatcher Government which he trasts with the rhetorical claims of its porters and opponents. He discusses origins of the Conservatives' 1979 gramme, then goes through the policies oduced after 1979, listing what was e and not done and why. The roughness and shrewdness of the lysis makes this book the single most portant and reliable source for the icies and events of the first Thatcher government, and will correct many misapprehensions. But it has a wider interest because Riddell is seeking to answer the question, how much has Thatcher changed British politics? Is it right to speak of a Thatcher experiment and a Thatcherite strategy, and if so is it now right after the 1983 victory to speak of a new Thatcherite consensus in British politics?

Riddell deploys strong arguments for doubting the radical and innovative character of Thatcherism. The evidence shows, he claims, that the Government has had 'a less than coherent strategy'. If there was a Thatcher experiment in economic management it was launched by Denis Healey. The reduction of inflation, he thinks, was not due primarily to the medium term financial strategy but to the recession. The Government's technical economic management was incompetent, and he cites studies showing that the dramatic productivity gains of 1980/81 have been short-lived. Spending policies and industrial policies have been muddled and inconsistent. The Government has failed to mount a sustained challenge to universal welfare provision, and has showed greater commitment to private enterprise than to the free market.

He concludes that although Thatcher has won the political initiative in Britain, the Thatcher Government has achieved relatively little. It has been unable to reverse decline or shift decisively popular attitudes on welfare and the public sector. He expects that when the Conservatives lose office many of the distinctive Thatcherite policies will be reversed. Thatcherism will appear as another episode in the long process of managing decline, not a decisive turning point towards a revitalised economy and a new political order. The Thatcher experiment has been a failure. It has challenged but not overturned the post-war consensus.

Loyal Thatcherites reading this after the TUC's decision not to support the NGA and the growing evidence of a substantial economic recovery might be forgiven for thinking, if this is failure who needs success? But Riddell is clearly right in believing that the crucial tests for the Thatcher Government will come in its second term. One of these tests will be the strength and permanence of the recovery now under way. A second test is the kind of political system Thatcherism will leave behind.

This is one of the questions John Ross addresses. He argues that the British party system is breaking up and that the primary cause is the decline of the Conservative Party. He documents in considerable detail the rise of the Conservative Party to its electoral high point in 1931 and its subsequent decline. Every major Conservative victory since 1931 has seen the Tory percentage of the vote at a lower level than the one before and the regional support which the Conservatives once commanded in N. Ireland, in Scotland, in Lancashire, and in the West Midlands has been gradually eroded. Thatcher's victory has temporarily arrested this loss of support but not Ross believes reversed it. This is because the economic interests which the Tory party represents are no longer compatible with the political alliance which allowed it to secure a dominant electoral position. In the 1970s the relative decline of the British economy reached a point where world recession dramatically exposed and penalised the backwardness and uncompetitiveness of large parts of British industry. Ross interprets Thatcherism as an attempt to reverse decline by favouring the most successful sectors of British capital at the expense primarily of manufacturing industry.

Ross believes the strategy will fail because the prosperity of the British economy cannot be restored by relying on the dominant sectors alone. The Conservatives are likely to suffer a major electoral

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collapse at some future election which will carry their support down below the 35% achieved in October 1974. This poses a severe dilemma for British capitalism, because, Ross argues, the nature of Britain's 'investment imperialism' means that its key interests cannot be safeguarded permanently by a social democratic party which is rooted in the labour movement. Ross explains the rise of the SDP as part of the attempt by forces hostile to socialism to create a non-socialist alternative to the Conservatives, so that in future pro-capitalist parties always control or participate in the government. On this reading the key test of whether the Thatcher experiment has been a success lies in the character of the opposition that next wins an election against the Conservatives. If this is the Alliance then crucial aspects of the Thatcherite period, such as the trade union legislation and the privatisation measures, will not be overturned. The result could be a long-term marginalisation of Labour and socialist ideas and interests in British politics.

Ross draws the conclusion that attempt to organise a coalition of Thatcher forces rather than pro-Lal forces will permit the effective cons ation of the Thatcherite consensus anc stifling of socialist opposition. On Labour Party that remains independe alliances and committed to socialist pol can prevent the consolidation of Thatcherite consensus.

Riddell lays too little emphasis on changing character of the party system notes but does not further consider

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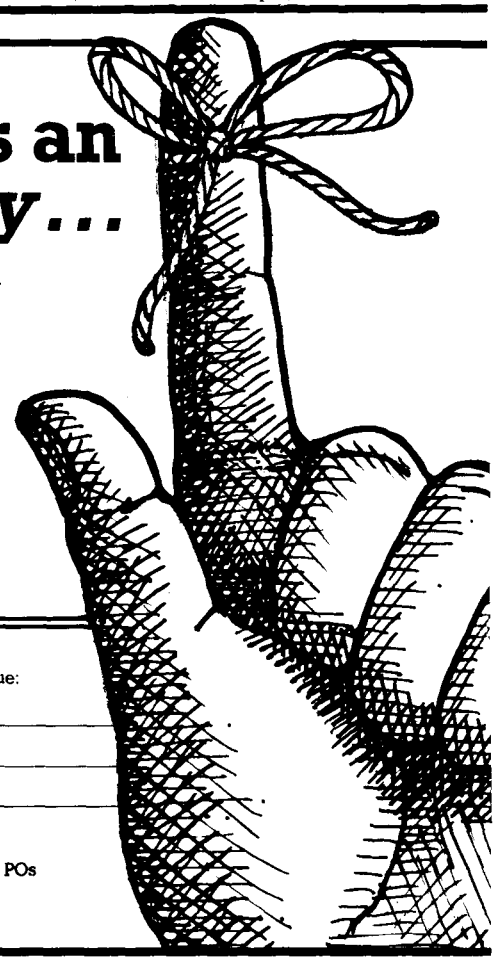

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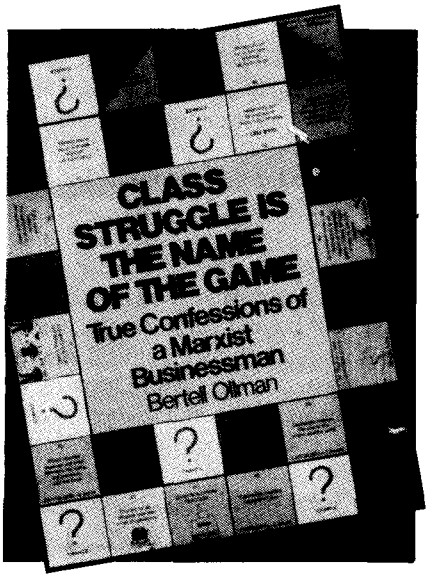
te far-reaching changes in British tics which could occur if the Thatcher ernment succeeded in what increasingly ears its primary political aim — the manent weakening of the Labour Party the labour movement. Only if that is e, however, does continued manage- it of decline on the present pattern ain politically safe. Ross sees the effects he disintegration of the party system y well but it is misleading to pose the ice for Labour simply as pro- or i-coalition. It remains unclear from his ount how, given the present balance of es in British politics, a Labour Party t fails to become the main focus for the i-Tory majority can prevent the altern- e scenario which Ross outlines from ng realised — the emergence of the ance as the main opposition. That ht signal the end of Thatcher's personal , but the Thatcherite consensus would much more permanent.

Andrew Gamble



ASS STRUGGLE IS THE NAME THE GAME, True Confessions of a rxist Businessman
tell Ollman
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st met Bertell Ollman on a state farm in People's Democratic Republic of nen. We were both part of that central itution of the post-revolutionary world, *delegation*, and were visiting the PDRY the occasion of the tenth anniversary of ependence, the British withdrawal from en of 1967. I knew his classic work *Alienation* and had heard about him from former students and American marxists. I expected an east coast professor, dapper in bow tie and herring bone jacket. Instead, under the hot South Arabian sun, I found this jovial but unconventional figure, in T-shirt and straw hat, quizzing the state offocials on the role of women in the farm and on the real degree of local democracy. Not for him the banalities of the *Rude Pravo* correspondent.

Ollman took an enthusiastic and critical part in the PDRY celebrations. He even donated some volumes by Wilhelm Reich to the new university library. But then, in 1977, he was most keen on his new project of Marxist pedagogy, the board game *Class Struggle* which, as a kind of anti-*Monopoly*, was to bring the message of Marx and Engels to a wider audience than had so far been possible through normal teaching and publishing methods. *Class Struggle* would, like the Jesuits, get to the kids when they were young; it would inspire those locked in the wage-slave situation; it would show that socialist struggle could be fun. *Homo ludens* would merge with the militant.

Next time I met Bertell the game was out, and had received widespread favourable publicity. But it was evident that all was not going according to plan. There had been an unresolved conflict with strikers at a major department store, Brentano's, who wanted Ollman and his associates to black the shop. Ollman himself had become involved in a draining conflict with the University of Maryland who had appointed him head of their political science department and then cancelled the offer: not even references from his former teachers, Isaiah Berlin and Zbigniew Brzezinski, could clinch it for him. And his Greenwich Village flat bore all the signs of the left-wing cadre under stress: instead of the piles of unsold party papers in the hallway, here it was row after row of unsold *Class Struggles*. The home-becomes-warehouse syndrome, familiar to every drained purveyor of the revolutionary truth, had come in a big and bulky way.

This book is the story of what happened, and what went wrong. It has elements of tragedy and comedy familiar to all who have mixed their revolutionary politics with the capitalist market: the bills that never get paid, the humiliations of retailers who don't want the product, the growing pressure on friendships and family, the frustration at the inability to convert theoretical 'understanding' of the capitalist system into profit or even returns; above all the realisation that once again and in a new and initially more hopeful dimension the masses are *not* rallying.

Ollman tells his story with humour, a complete lack of self-importance, but a trace of anger, sadness and regret. In the end the problem was simple: *Class Struggle* did not sell enough. Between 1979 and 1982 it sold around 180,000 copies — in US, Italian and German editions. No mean feat. But not enough to cover the debts or recompense Bertell, his wife Paule, and his sorely tried friends for the nightmare they had been through. The maintenance and promotion costs, the chicaneries of other businessmen, the amateurish mistakes of the promotion group themselves, and, beyond it all but clear as an evening skyline, political prejudice at the point of sale combined to prevent *Class Struggle* from breaking into the big league.

In a sense, this is a tale of a double defeat — of Ollman the playing man, and Ollman the Marxist professor. He had, as he describes it, overestimated the willingness of capitalism to concede in order to preserve its liberal image. The buyers at Bloomingdales said maybe, and then no. The judges in Maryland after long and costly delays, found in favour of the university authorities who revoked his contract. Ollman may also have been to some extent a victim of the onset of the new cold war climate: many of those marginal judgements by buyers could have gone the other way a decade or even five years earlier.

The underlying problems of the story are evident enough to him. One was that the question of combating capitalism through the game was far more difficult than he initially imagined: games are big business, both as commodities and as ideology. For that very reason, the entrances are well-guarded. *Monopoly* means what it says. The second problem is that despite his aspirations, Bertell is not a Marxist businessman: he is a Marxist trying to go into business, but a million miles from the likes of Engels, Parvus, and Carrillo who have at some point in the history of the socialist movement sat in the capitalist's chair. In temperament too Bertell did not have the hard skin that has enabled many a former, or remaining, stalwart of the communist movement to amass a fortune later in life. His own personality and values are irremediably antipathetic to capitalism and what sustains it. And this is, of course, his greatest virtue.

Fred Halliday

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VIEWPOINT

Labour's Lost Millions 4

We conclude the debate with...

DAVE COOK: Open to the outside world

Eric Heffer expresses the commonly held view that within the Labour Party 'to a large extent the renewal process (particularly the constitutional reforms — DC) has been completed, and now the time has come to consolidate the changes, to translate them into campaigns throughout the country and win support for the party.' The job now is to pose Labour's programme as the alternative to Thatcherism and to campaign powerfully for it.

Apparently the only other choice on offer for Heffer is what he alleges to be the thesis of Hobsbawm and Rowthorn, namely that Labour must reach some accommodation with the SDP/Liberal Alliance in order to unite the anti-Tory forces (although Rowthorn is certainly opposed to any call now for a coalition government). However it is not defence of Hobsbawm and Rowthorn that concerns me here, but an element in the discussion which I think Heffer and others have missed, that of *stages* of political change.

The labour movement has to rebuild a majority around it; on that almost every one on the Left is agreed. Incidentally, Eric, the labour movement — by which term most people mean the Labour Party, the trade unions, the Co-operative and other left political forces like the Communists — is a much broader conception than the Labour Party. This has enabled non Labour Party socialists to use the 'royal We' long before 'your' party was formed.

At some stage this majority has to be expressed at the polls for a Labour government to be established. More than this, to have any chance of implementing the advanced programme on which Labour now stands, it will have to be a political majority of a new type, informed, active and vigilant — something which on the working class side we have not yet seen in British politics. At present a major part of this potential majority have rejected Labour.

Fortunately many of these predominantly working class people can be, and indeed in the case of CND are being, attracted by broad campaigns on the great issues of peace, jobs and democracy. When the forces of the labour movement get it together to provide imaginative leads on all these questions, millions, including in some areas, a majority of non Labour voters and non union members, will be influenced. This process, and the ferment of politicisation it can give rise to, are absolutely vital in helping to 'destabilise' the grip of right wing attitudes.

The Labour Party can and does make a very important contribution to such broad campaigning activity. For example the appeal and impact of the great October CND National Demonstration was greatly enhanced by the work of many local Labour Parties and the participation of Neil Kinnock in its rally. Nonetheless any attempt to narrow down the breadth of campaigns like CND, and those which we hope will develop on other issues, into political vehicles for the Labour Party, will greatly weaken their ability to attract precisely those millions of non Labour voters who must be won. Eric Heffer's approach represents this danger.

Involving people in anti-Tory activity is not an alternative to 'winning support for the party'. It is the precondition for it. That is why the recent Communist Party Congress described the immediate priority as 'building an anti-Tory majority,' a task which should not be seen primarily in electoral terms.

The Communist Party does not advocate this as some sort of subterfuge to give itself legitimacy, as Heffer is suggesting; although it is worth making the point that it is within the Communist Party that the need for this new approach has been most debated. The very fact that its theoretical journal is hosting this vital strategic discussion would suggest that the party is not an 'anachronism'. Communists hope that their work will help create the conditions for a *later* stage when the election of a Labour government (*not* a coalition government) becomes the priority.

If Heffer is right that the main task now is to pose a clear socialist alternative to Thatcherism, then many of the problems of Labour's politics highlighted recently in *Marxism Today* and elsewhere, become less significant. However if the Communist Party is right to insist on the creation anti-Tory majority then criticisms of s aspects of the Labour Left, and CP, po assume much greater importance.

For example Heffer's statement Labour 'must update and refine its pol but must do so as an independent p not getting itself enmeshed in alliances others' contains within it a gla contradiction. If Labour's renewal is complete, from where except outside Labour Party is the impulse for 'upda going to come? One has only to think o militancy around the Pentonville dock the Industrial Relations Act and miners' strikes; the impact of feminism the black people's movements; the pres for devolution; the Anti Nazi League, Peoples March for Jobs and the revit ation of CND. These impulses were ma from the Left but Labour can also l from political forces usually described its 'right'. For example on immigrat racism and issues of personal liberty, s as pressure for a Freedom of Informa Act, the Liberals have been n consistently radical than Labour. electoral reform they still are.

Heffer's approach would mean that 'renewed' Labour Party was well fence from any such future political inputs, matter whence they came. The party wo be the poorer for it, and so therefore wo be weakened the changes for a spe defeat of Thatcherism and what co follow from this.

ROGER POOLE: Trade unions matter

Whilst not agreeing with Eric Hobsba on the need for the Labour Party and supporters to consider the possibility coalition politics, he raises issues of m importance to the movement if we ar strike out afresh after the appalling de of 1983. It is refreshing to read an anal of the election defeat that does not upon a simplistic abandonment of soci policies to bring back the lost voters Labour's fold.

Having said that some policies were over in such a way as to make th unattractive to the electorate and were

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esponsible for the defeat. An example at was Labour's 'housing policy'. By g that we would not force local orities to sell houses (a perfectly nable position) the electorate believed hey were right in some cases, that we against council tenants becoming r occupiers. The sight of well-heeled r-occupying MPs and trade union rs telling relatively poor council its paying extortionate rents that they l not enjoy the benefits of owner bancy purely because they couldn't l to buy in the private market ked not only of elitism, but hypocrisy ell.

ilst there is always a need in a ist party to reconsider policies and tion as circumstances change, it is my that with one or two exceptions, our ies were broadly right. What was g was the electorate's perception of the ment we allowed and were responsible Eric Hobsbawm mentioned the ons inside the Party, and the image of ided leadership which went from bad orse during the campaign but which s roots in the arguments that had been ucted in the Party over many years. campaign to extend democracy in the after the 1979 defeat was essential to ebuilding of the Party but it left us theless, in the timescale available, to fight the 1983 election. With a new rship, however, and providing there is derstanding that the Party does and very right to make policy, and that the f the leadership is to support and put policy into action, the Labour Party ld be able now to put its organisation her so that it is in a fit state to fight and he next election.

trade union connection

f that power will however elude the unless the trade unions, too, give a different perspective to the public of activities. Millions of trade unionists not vote Labour. One of the main ons for this is that rightly the unions the Labour Party are seen to be very , but outside the very narrow area of s and conditions the unions have lost moral support of millions of their bers.

o longer do trade unionists look upon unions as being on the side of the ls whilst everything and everyone sed to them is in the camp of the devil. actions, attitudes and activities of y trade union leaders and others in ions of leadership have been the antithesis of democratic behaviour. That does for people on the Left as well as the Right of the trade union movement. Whilst the labour movement was seen for years as fighting to extend people's rights in all facets of their lives, in recent years we have allowed our enemies every opportunity to portray us as undemocratic, self-seeking supporters of those who have the industrial clout to secure improvements, with no thought for those who do not possess that clout.

The truth of the matter has not, of course, been as bad as the perception, but the perception has been the determining factor in people's attitudes not just to the unions but because of the close relationship to the Labour Party as well.

An example is the way in which the unions conducted themselves in the leadership elections. The reason we wanted to extend the franchise was to give more people a say in who our leaders were and in so doing to give millions of people a real and a practical stake in the Labour Party. Transferring the vote from the PLP to union executives is not in my view a very large step towards mass politics. When those executives then compound that error by casting millions of votes for their preferred candidate the manna starts falling from heaven on the leader writers desk at the *Daily Mail*.

Even some of those unions that did go out to ballot their members must ask themselves what real efforts they made to ensure that as many of their members as possible had the opportunity and participated? Our politics and our trade unionism has to come out of the smoke-filled rooms. Closed and elitist politics are no longer good enough for our people.

Whereas in the past trade unionists have been prepared to stand by and follow their leaders and then more lately their shop stewards, they are now demanding much greater control of their unions and their activities. Indeed, because the Left has preached much greater democracy in our unions over the years, we are to some extent the very cause of the discontent felt by many trade union members. The Left should not be supporting the past practices of the undemocratic Right much of which has now deserted to a place where they can continue their autocratic practices. The block vote which continues to sweep the CLPs to one side must be looked at.

The people will not elect a Labour government which has close ties with what they perceive to be an undemocratic trade union movement.

One of the Labour Party's main planks in its economic strategy was the extension of the public sector. Without major public sector investment programmes, it will be impossible to roll back the frontiers of mass unemployment and manufacturing industry will stay in decline. The problem with the strategy that the Labour Party had however was not, as some have said, that the policy was wrong, but that the public's view of the public sector is very low indeed.

The reason is very simple. The trade unions neglected through years of consensus politics in this country to protect and maintain pride in the provision of our public services and nationalised industries. Questions of industrial democracy and consumer protection and satisfaction have been low on the list of collective bargaining issues and sometimes have not even been considered. The exception to the rule has been the NHS and to the extent that we have defended it, there is overwhelming public support for it, and it is the one area that the Thatcher government, despite the appalling cuts it has made, finds itself continually on the defensive.

If only the same could be said about local government, the railways, the steel industry etc. When the electorate is faced with a programme of expansion for the public sector it must be something they are prepared to support because they have personal experience of its superior quality. We must never forget that with a hostile media we have as trade unionists to ensure that the public sector gives a public demonstration of its worth.

In conclusion, therefore, the revival of the Labour Party is not in Labour's hands alone, the trade union movement by its actions and through its assessment by the public will have a major effect on Labour's fortunes.

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Letters

LEFT AND THE MARATHON

lways like a breath of fresh air to read t Hall on politics. But, with his latest *The Culture Gap* (January *Marxism y*), he has not only written a brilliant but has opened the way forward for a ive diversification of left politics, cing free from the economist strait- t Eric Heffer *et al* have ready for us to

would like briefly to elaborate on t's comments on sport. I am a keen thon runner; this year hundreds of sands of like minded souls will be g part in this supreme athletic enge. And what has the Left to say t this phenomenon? Nothing! Yet here section of the population that are inly 'activists', are already deprived of ties, and will be hard hit by attacks on government; they have a particular est in defending the NHS (who else is ; to care for our tendons and our ients?). Sport is patently political but nly seem to comment on it when it place in South Africa.

need to be more than just aware of re, but to intervene in it too. I hope his year's marathon runners will have le more offered to them by the Left a symbol to attach to their vests.

Mark Perryman, Dudley

D ROTHSCHILD

December 1983 issue of *Marxism y* carried a *Focus* feature called ible at the Poly' which contained a nce that might have been read as esting that the Industrial Relations arch Unit at the University of Warwick now 'supervised' by the banker Lord schild. Such a suggestion is entirely rect. The IRRU is an independent rch organisation funded by the Social ice Research Council. Its only connec- with Lord Rothschild (the scientist, the banker) was his report on the C. This reproduced an allegation made ord Beloff that the IRRU was 'unfairly d in favour of the unions'. That ation was fully investigated by a nittee under Sir Kenneth Berrill h completely exonerated the IRRU.

Mike Terry, University of Warwick

MUNIST FINANCES

no comfort to members of the munist Party to read of some of the ulties arising out of the Labour Party's financial problems, as described in Mortimer's letter in the January issue of *Marxism Today*. It will, I am sure, be no surprise to, and, I hope, equally no comfort, for, members of the Labour party, to learn that the Communist Party also has acute financial problems. These have also led to reductions in full-time staff, both at the Party Centre, and in the District and Area organisations of the Party.

For the past nine years, the Communist Party has organised an Annual National Fund Appeal, which has raised in total over half a million pounds. While this is a magnificent achievement, the money raised has not been adequate to meet the Party's requirements.

Readers of *Marxism Today* could be of great assistance, by responding generously to the Tenth Annual National Appeal of the Party, with a view to eliminating any shortfall this year, and thus creating the possibility of a substantial increase in the public presentation of our case and in our capacity effectively to present it.

The Appeal period will run from 20th February to 26th March. Early donations will be welcome, and can be sent to Gordon McLennan, 16 St John Street, London EC1.

Gerry Cohen, London

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE

I am delighted to see the discussion taking place in your columns on *Labour's Lost Millions*. A whole lot of problems are being exposed to the light of day. Two issues where we are totally out of tune with ordinary people are home ownership and the police.

There is nothing anti-socialist about wanting to own one's home; workers who want to do so have not been infected with a capitalist virus. We can encourage the move towards home ownership, whilst at the same time pointing out the appalling housing crisis now facing the country, and the vital need for more public house building in a variety of forms. We will not get a hearing, or deserve one, if we appear as a bunch of middle-class socialists, owning our own homes, but wanting for 'obscure' political reasons to deny the same right to the majority of voters.

On the question of the police, the Tories have been given the issue by default. We have no clearly thought out policy, and one has only to mention the word police at certain left-wing gatherings to produce a state of collective apoplexy. This won't do. Our people want their homes and families protected; we should be at one with them here. Having established our credentials, we can then explain to people why we don't want the police acting in their various political and security roles. We will then get a lot of support.

Bert Munro and Des Walshe are right (*Marxism Today*, Jan 84); we have got to start hearing and listening to the people we wish to represent. For many on the Left this will be a new and, I suspect, painful experience.

John Hodgson, Chairman, Peacehaven, Telscombe & East Saltdean Labour Party.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Ron Peters is a journalist.
Jane Harris is a trade union researcher.
Avi Ehrlich is one of the editors of *Khamsin*, a Marxist journal on Middle Eastern affairs.
Jean Gardiner is a member of the *Marxism Today* Editorial Board and is a lecturer at Leeds University.
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Martin Myant is the editor of *Scottish Marxist* and author of *Poland: a crisis for socialism*.
John McIlroy teaches industrial relations at Manchester University.
John Lloyd is the Labour Editor of the *Financial Times*.
Michèle Roberts is a poet and novelist.
Richard Dyer lectures in film studies at Warwick University.
Roy Armes is a Reader in film at Middlesex Polytechnic and author of the forthcoming book *Third World Cinema and the West*.
Christine Geraughty works for NALGO.
Fred Halliday is the author of *The Making of the Second Cold War*.
Andrew Gamble is the author of *Britain in Decline*.
Dave Cook is a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party.
Roger Poole is a national officer of NUPE.

We welcome your letters for the March issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday 3 February.

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Update

NEWS

GLC Anti-Racist Year London will be designated an Anti-Racist Zone and a programme developed to raise awareness among Londoners of the oppressive and discriminatory effects of racism against London's black and other ethnic minorities. Details 01-633 4270.

From Stratford upon Avon to Newcastle on Tyne This month the Royal Shakespeare Company transfers the whole of Stratford's current repertoire to the Theatre Royal and the Gulbenkian Studio, Newcastle. Productions include *Twelfth Night, The Comedy of Errors, Measure for Measure* and a week of events for 15-25s. From 20 Feb to 31 March. Details Nicola Russell 0789 296655.

CP Tenth National Fund Appeal The aim is to raise £100,000 between February 20 and March 26. Early donations welcome, to be sent to Gordon McLennan, 16 St John Street, London EC1.

CAMPAIGNS

National Lobby for the Arts Set up in response to stringent cuts on the Arts Council budget, this all party campaign is now opposing government plans which would have a devastating effect on the culture of major metropolitan cities. Museums, art galleries, theatres and innovatory programmes of ethnic and community arts are all at risk. Contact Pierre Audi, Almeida Theatre, Almeida Street, London N1.

CONFERENCES

Politics and Technology of Possible Catastrophe 4, 11 Feb. First day covers the nuclear numbers game and looks at global issues; on the 11th the results of nuclear conflict for Britain. Organised by Extra-Mural Dept of University of London. £5.00 per day or £9.00 for both (£2 and £4.00 unwaged). Details Richard Clarke, R255, 26 Russell Square, London WC1.

What Price Trident? 11 Feb Trade Union Conference on unemployment and the Bomb, chaired by Rodney Bickerstaffe. Speakers include Margaret Beckett MP and Tony Benn. At County Hall, London 10-5pm. Registration £1.00 from Trident Conference c/o ACTT, 2 Soho Square, London W1 01-437 8506.

Conference on the Police Bill 11 Feb. Organised by Greater London Association of Trades Councils. At Congress House, 2-5pm.

Ecology in London 14 Feb A GLC Conference, with London Boroughs, to discuss ecological planning. At County Hall, 10.30am. Also exhibitions in Main Foyer. Details Dr Gould 01-633 5988.

Anti Trident Convention 25 Feb To discuss the need to organise against Britain's own deadly contribution to the arms race — Trident. Speakers, workshops, videos, displays etc. Free Trade Hall, Manchester 11-5pm. Details from Anti Trident Campaign, 420 Sauchiehall St, Glasgow G2. 041-332 3141.

National Abortion Campaign Conference Abortion rights and facilities, what future? 25 Feb, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. SAE for details: 47, Waldram Park Road, London SE23 2PN.

The politics of history 3 Feb. Meeting to launch the History Workshop Centre for Social History to be followed by a celebration party. Speakers include Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel. Contributions of food/drink welcome. 7.30 to 9.30pm. Buxton Hall, Ruskin College, Oxford.

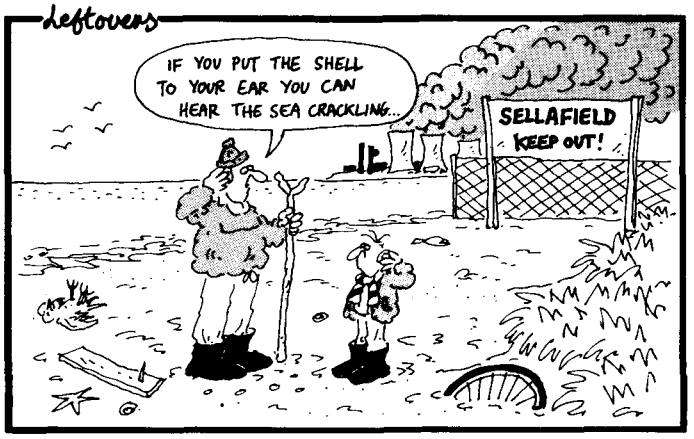
The Caribbean Diaspora 1, 15, 29 Feb. Discussion forum organised by Goldsmiths Steering Group for Caribbean Studies. 1 Feb Robin Blackburn on patterns of slave emancipation in the Americas. 15 Feb Errol Lawrence on historical perspective on the black presence in Britain, 29 Feb Charles Faustin on VS Naipaul. 7.30pm R219 Education Block, Goldsmiths, London.

Labour's Lost Millions 7 Feb. A public discussion organised jointly by Marxism Today and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee with Beatrix Campbell, Robin Cook, Harriet Harman and Eric Hobsbawm. 7.30pm Friends House, Euston Rd, London NW1. Tickets £1 waged, 50p unwaged. Send SAE to Marxism Today 16 St John Street, London EC1.

Whistle blowers 14 Feb. A meeting to discuss what happens to scientists whose opinions don't fit their employer's politics. Organised by the Society for Social Responsibility in Science. 7.30pm at Polytechnic Students Union, Sidney Street, Manchester 10.

Forward Face of Feminism 23 Feb. Discussion opened by Tricia Davis, organised by Dudley CP. 7.30pm. The Swan, Castle Street, Dudley.

CP philosophy group discussion weekend 4-5 Feb. 10-4.30 Sat, 11-4.30 Sun. Speakers include Don Cuckson, Tom Vaughan, Derek Harding and John Hasted. The cost is £1 for a session, £3 for the weekend. More information from Alan Spence, 16 St John Street, London EC1.



EVENTS

Waking London's Living Memory 17-19 Feb. A Multi-cultural festival to represent London's colourful history. With exhibitions, workshops, discussions, stalls, films and videos, reminiscence, theatre and oral history. All groups encouraged to participate. County Hall, details Exploring Living Memory, 92 Queens Square, London WC1. 01-831 8871.

The Turning Left Show 25 Feb. A day of discussion, debate and entertainment, organised by Kings Heath CP and Marxism Today. Sessions on the Left in the 80s, the peace movement, Central America, the health service, and Today's Marxism. Creche, videos and food. £2 waged, £1 unwaged. Centre 13, School Road, Mosely. Contact KHCP, 69 All Saints Road, Birmingham 14. 021-692 1765.

1st Harwich Peace Festival 3 March Peace Fair and rally with theatre, music and workshops. 2-5pm. Evening folk concert. 8-11pm. Harwich Leisure Club Victoria Road, Harwich. All proceeds to CND. Details from West 0204 694232.

PUBLICATIONS

National Welfare Benefits Handbook and Rights Guide to means tested social security bene The Child Poverty Action Group updated and reissued their two authoritative rights guides to me and non means tested benefits. P £3, CPAG, 1 Macklin Street, London WC2.

Real Life The theoretical and discussion journal of the Young Communist League is now availa with a complete redesign. Artic include Labourism, youth cultu young women and socialism, th Eisteddfod (bi-lingual) and an interview with John Cooper Cla Price 30p (plus postage) from M Perryman, 16 St John Street, London EC1.

Mukti A new magazine produce and for Asian women. The first i has articles on immigration law campaigns, the media view of A women, self defence, rickets. Available in Hindi, Punjabi, Gujerati, Bengali, Urdu and Eng from *Mukti*, 213 Eversholt St, London NW1. 60p. Subscriptic £2.40 individuals, £6.00 organisations.

FILMS, VIDEO

Two videos are available for hi GLC residents. Video 1 has *If y love this planet*, a documentary c the dangers of nuclear war. Vide has *Talking History* in which CL James and EP Thompson talk at the nuclear issue and the rise of n movements. Available free of ch for up to 2 days from the Other Cinema, 79 Wardour Street, Lon W1 01-734 8508.

Stuart Hall's Marx Memorial Lecture A VHS video of the complete lecture (55 mins), give the centenary of Marx's death, t audience of 900 at Sheffield City Hall, available for sale or hire fr Steel Bank Film Co-op, Albred House, Lydgate Lane, Sheffield (0742 662583).

Entries for the March Update s be sent as soon as possible (late Friday 3 February) to Maria L Marxism Today 16 St John Str London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 01-607 3344 (evenings).

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Nicaragua Study Tour 19 February to 6 March 1984. To Managua (4 days), Masaya, Matalya, Esteli, and the English speaking region on the Atlantic coast. Full daily programme of meetings and discussions and visits to co-operatives, political and trade union organisations etc. In association with Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign and New Socialist Magazine. Further tours planned for Easter and summer vacations.

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Independent or group travel via Moscow and trans-Siberian rail or air routes to Mongolia, Beijing or Tokyo, returning via Hong Kong or continuing to Australia or the US West Coast. From £265 one way to Beijing.

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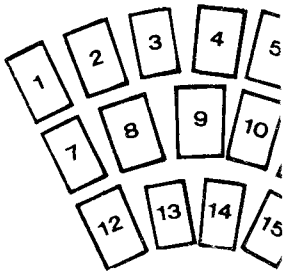

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